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# THE POETIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF TORU DUTT

Dr. K.A. AGRAWAL

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# THE POETIC ACHIEVEMENT OF TORU DUTT

107529.

*By*

Dr. K. A. AGRAWAL, *M. A., Ph. D.*
HARDWAR (U. P.)

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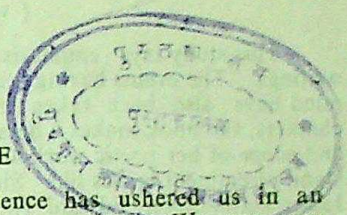

# PREFACE

The dawn of Indian Independence has ushered us in an altogether changed political and social atmosphere. We are now proud of our nation, and have begun to free ourselves from the glamour of the West and study our customs and traditions, literature and culture, with a sense of awe and admiration. This revival of interest in Indo-Anglian literature is a direct offshoot of the altered atmosphere. It is the need of the hour ; it is the call the nation. Indo-Anglian authors are now studied with pleasure and profit both in India and abroad side by side with their English and American counterparts.

Of all the Indo-Anglian authors, Toru Dutt stands out as a poet. A Hindu by birth and a Christian by education, this illustrious daughter of Bengal, while waging a grim yet heroic battle against her delicate health and foul disease, started a hectic literary activity by the sweep of her imagination. She wrote very fast, as may be gathered from the fact that within a space of three years she produced no fewer than four literary volumes, nothing to speak of her long illuminating essays, letters and translations of speeches in French. She perhaps heard, (as Lowell surmises) what Keats did, a voice urging 'What thou doest, do quickly' ; and when her dear sister, Aru, died of consumption like her only brother, Abju, she became almost certain that the would also meet the same fate. Thereafter, she, like Keats again, began working with all the restless energy of a haunted creative writer.

But it is strange that such a dedicated soul should long be remembered for her "Savitri" and shorter poems. And it is all the more strange that she is regarded today, by a certain coterie of critics, as 'a dead horse', not worthy enough to be 'flogged' by a serious student of Indo-Anglian literature. The present study attempts to point out that Toru's other poems, too, have much merit in them, and that she is still very much alive through her inspiring work. Her total poetic output has been fully analysed here in order to ascertain her position in Indo-Anglian poetry.

Toru's contribution to Indo-Anglian literature as a whole is noteworthy. In fact, the entire structure of this brand of poetry is based on her solid achievement. She was the first Indian writer to handle English verse with ease and command. Her poetry may be meagre in bulk, but it is of permanent worth, and this makes her at once the 'first major poet' in Indo-Anglian literature.

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This study lays emphasis on the poetic aspects of Toru's writings. The events having a direct bearing on her poetic art and mind have also been taken into account. Consisting of eight chapters, the book makes a detailed investigation into the nature and scope of her poetic work and traits and seeks to justify the stand of eminent critics like Sir Edmund Gosse, H.A.L. Fisher, James Darmesteter, Edward Thompson, Harihar Das, and others that in matters of chronology and quality she is at the head of Indo-Anglian poets.

This work is the substantial part of my Ph. D. thesis submitted in 1978 to the University of Meerut and approved by a panel of three examiners of eminent scolarship, and I would like to place on record my deep sense of gratitude to the University in permitting me to publish it in this form and to the examiners for their avowal of it. I must also register my deep indebtedness to Dr. K.C. Bhatnagar, my supervisor, and to Dr. A.N. Dwivedi, my *de facto* supervisor who guided my first steps in research and offered me suggestions from time to time for his love of learning.

It would have been impossible for me to complete this work without the active co-operation of the staff of the National Library, Calcutta, of the Bombay University Library, Bombay, of the Western Regional Centre of Indian Council of Social Science Research, Bombay, of the Delhi Public Library, Delhi, and of the Gurukula Kangri University Library, Hardwar, and I want to thank the staff and the able Librarians of these centres of higher learning for their invaluable help to me.

I also feel a sense of obligation to many distinguished scholars for their timely assistance and wise council offered to me whenever I approached them, — to Dr. K.R.S. Iyengar, Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, Prof. Sisir Kumar Ghose, Dr. Prithwindranath Mukherjee, Dr. Sitansu Mitra, Dr. M.K. Naik, and Mr. Dipendranath Mitra. Lastly, I have to thank Swami Siddhananda of Najibabad (U.P.) for his constant encouragement to me in undertaking and completing this research project well in time.

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# 1

# The Renaissance in India and Toru Dutt

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) occupies a prominent place in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. When she started writing, Indo-Anglian poetry was in its infancy. Though mocked by Destiny at every step, she went on with her work with firm determination and produced astounding results. Her predecessors like Derozio and Kasiprasad and Madhusudan were mere explorers in the field, and it is not till we come to her that we find "the first solid achievement"[1] in Indo-Anglian poetry. The present study is intended to make an overall assessment of Toru Dutt's poetic achievement for which she is so well remembered today and will continue to be remembered even in the days to come.

In the early nineteenth century, there set in a movement in this country towards a new life and a new thought that is generally characterized as the Renaissance in India. This Renaissance, this new birth in India, became, in due course of time, a thing of immense importance both to herself and to the world,—to herself because of all that is meant for her in the recovery or the change of her time-old spirit and national ideals, to the world because of the immense possibilities involved in the reasserting of a force that is in many respects unlike any other and its genius very different from the mentality and spirit that have hitherto governed the modern idea in mankind. Subtle critics and thinkers like James H. Cousins and Sri Aurobindo have touched suggestively various sides of the Renaissance in India.

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1. B.K. Talookdar, "The Poetry of Toru Dutt, "*Journal of the University of Bombay*, VI, Part 6 (May 1936), 71.

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The term 'Renaissance' carries the mind back to the turning-point of European culture to which it was first applied ; that was not so much a reawakening as an overturn and reversal, a seizure of Christianised, Teutonised, feudalised Europe by the old Graeco-Latin spirit and form with all the complex and momentous results which came from it. That is decidedly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India. There is a closer resemblance to the Celtic movement in Ireland, the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding : in Ireland this was discovered by a return to the Celtic spirit and culture after a long period of eclipsing English influences and in India something of the same kind of movement appeared and took a pronounced turn.

Cousins puts the question in his book, *The Renaissance in India* (1918), whether the word 'renaissance' at all applies in the Indian context since India has always been awake and stood in no need of reawakening. There is a certain truth in it, and to one of open mind, struck by the living continuity of past and present India, it may be especially apparent ; but that is not how we, the Indians, see it. There was, beyond doubt, a period, brief but very disastrous, of the dwindling of that great fire of life, even a moment of incipient disintegration, an adventure by chance, inwardly by an increasing torpor of the creative spirit in religion and art (science and philosophy and intellectual knowledge being long dead or petrified into a mere scholastic Punditism). All this pointed to a nadir of setting energy, the evening-time from which, according to the Indian concept of *Yugas* (cycles of time), a new age had to start. It was that moment and the pressure of a superimposed European culture which followed it that made the reawakening inevitable.

Sri Aurobindo, while considering the question of the Renaissance in India, takes three factors into account : the great past of Indian culture and life with the moment of inadaptive torpor into which it had lapsed, the first period of the Western contact in which it seemed for a moment likely to perish by slow decomposition, and the ascending movement which first broke into some

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clarity of expression.[1] Cousins has his eye fixed on Indian spirituality which has always maintained itself even in the decline of the national vitality, and which has saved India always at every critical moment of her destiny. It was certainly her spirituality which has been the starting-point of her renaissance. Any other nation under the same pressure would have long ago perished soul and body. But India kept her essential spirit, though a great change overtook the body. The shaping of a new body, of new philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms by the same soul rejuvenescent was the type of the Indian renaissance,—forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect, completed.[2]

**British Rule in India**

As a result of the Indian renaissance, nationalism along with spiritual forces, began to assert itself. It sharply reacted against the imperialistic powers, especially the British regime. When the brave Britishers came to India, the Mughals were still in the saddle. In coming over to India, their basic design was to trade and 'get rich quick'. They succeeded in the pursuance of their design, and established the East India Company in 1600 A.D. Taking advantage of the disturbing situations in the country, they grew ambitious and won many estates and became rulers here. They continued to govern the country uptil 1947 when the Indian people compelled them to quit and go.

**The Beginnings of Education**

While administering the country, the Englishmen gave attention to the problem of education. The burning question before them was whether India was to adopt a wholly Westernised system of education with English as the medium of instruction or she was merely to continue the study of Sanskrit and Persian and impart education with the various regional languages as media. Macaulay's celebrated "Minute" (of which we shall speak more a little later) clinched the issue at last in favour of English.

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973), p. 4.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5

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Although the East India Company was founded long ago, the Britishers cared little or nothing for the education of the Indian people up to the end of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, the Governors of the Provinces and successive Governos-General showed little interest in Hindu or Islamic culture, and hence they did not tackle boldly the problem of illiteracy among the Indian masses. There were, at that time, four types of indigenous educational institutions in India :

(1) Pathshalas of the Hindus ;

(2) Madrassas of the Muslims ;

(3) Persian Schools, and ;

(4) Schools teaching through the modern Indian languages.[1]

Warren Hastings, no doubt, founded and liberally endowed the Calcutta Madrassa in 1781. In the previvous year, James Augustus Hicky had brought out at Calcutta the first newspaper of the country, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette.*

**Sir William Jones**

It was actually Sir William Jones who showed a real interest in the education of India, and his researches in the educational field ushered the country in a new era. He was a liberal Englishman and tried to understand the Indian populace and its problems. He had respects for the sacred literature of India, and looked upon himself as a servant, rather than as a ruler, of the people in whose midst he had to live and move. In his poem, "Ode in Imitation of Alcaeus," he pointed out that not 'high-raised battlement, or laboured mound' constitutes a State ; 'starred and spangled courts' are but dens 'where low-crowned baseness wafts perfumes to pride'; in his opinion, 'high-minded Men' alone make a strong and stable State. Jones founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, and published powerful renderings of *Shakuntalam* and *Hitopadesha.* He addressed a number of odes to Hindu gods, and wrote a long verse tale, *The Enchanted Fruit,* which is based on a *Mahabharata*

1. Syed Nurullah and J.P. Naik, *A Students' History of Education in India* : 1800-1947, Rev. ed. (Bombay : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 2.

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episode. Jones was an enlightened Englishman, who was a source of inspiration not only to his own countrymen, but also to Indians. He prompted them "to study the sacred Indian Literature reverently, to bring it to the notice of the masses, and to help the Indian renaissance to its fruitful blossoming in the fullness of time."[1] Jones and his comrades in Oriental scholarship were surely inspired by a stern, missionary zeal.

In 1791, Jonathan Duncan started the Sanskrit College at Banaras. Still India drifted for some fifty years more; neither Charles Grant's "Observations," nor Lord Moira's "Minute", nor the British Parliament's initiative in 1813, nor yet the formation of the Committee of Public Instruction in 1823, attempted any far-reaching solution of the educational problem.

In the meantime, three factors suddenly emerged and defined with great clarity the course of education in India for the next one hundred years and more. These were :

(1) the new intellectualism and renascent ardour among the Indians, as symbolized by Raja Rammohan Roy ;

(2) the perseverance of the Christian missionaries ; and above all,

(3) the persuasiveness and metallic clarity of Macaulay's English prose style.[2]

**Rammohan Roy and the Reformers**

A select band of Indians headed by Raja Rammohan Roy had tasted the fruits of Western literature and culture at close quarters and they naturally contrasted the West at its best with the decadence of Indian civilization. They were seized by a spirit of intolerance and aggressive reform. They strongly pleaded for the introduction of a system of Western education with English as the medium of instruction. With the generous help of two Englishmen, David Hare and Edward Hyde East, Raja Rammohan Roy inaugurated the Calcutta Hindu College, which

1. K.R. Srivinivasa Iyengar, *The Indian Contribution to English Literature* (Bombay : Karnatak Publishing House, 1945), pp. 2-3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 3

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later developed into the Presidency College. Starting with only one hundred students in 1817, the College steadily grew much and more popular and the number of students quadrupled within the next twenty years. In Bombay and Madras, however, people were rather slow to follow Calcutta's lead in educational matters.

The renaissance in modern Indian literature begins with Raja Rammohan Roy. Born in a village (Radhanagore) in Bengal on May 22, 1772, he died at Bristol on September 27, 1833. Roy was destined to act as a bridge between India and England. He had mastered many languages—Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Hindustani, and Bengali. After travelling within and outside India and making some business ventures at Calcutta, he served in the districts under two British officials—Woodforde and Digby. While working with Digby, Roy completed his mastery of the English language. Resigning from the company service at last, Roy returned to Calcatta in 1814, started the Atriya Sabha, and so launched himself on the consciousness of the Calcutta society. The next few years saw him in hectic activity. The plight of widows, the darkness of superstition, the miasma of ignorance, the general backwardness of the country, all stirred him to action. Though attracted by Christianity, Roy realized with sorrow that the bigoted Christian was as conceited as the bigoted Hindu. In 1821, he started a weekly paper, *Sambad Kaumudi*, which launched a sustained onslaught on the forces of prejudice and reaction. By 1823, he had fully matured, tested his friends, and re-considered his ends and means. During the remaining ten years of his life, 1823-1833, he crammed, in Brajendranath Seal's words, 'the work of half a dozen giants'. He was an intensely religious man, a Hindu and a Brahmin, who was always ready to accept 'the best' of Christianity and Islam. His name is permanently associated with the abolition of *sati* system (the forced burning of widows after the death of their husbands) and child-marriage. He was the founder of the Brahma Samaj.

Rammohan Roy published a number of pioneering works In 1820, his *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* came out. It proves his intense respect for the gospels of Christianity. His other writings were: *Brief Remarks regarding Modern*

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*Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance* (1822), and *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India, and of the General Character and Condition of its Native Inhabitants* (1832). Besides these brochures, he published several other papers and pamphlets touching upon almost every aspect of national life. He was indefatigable and refused to spare himself.

Besides Raja Rammohan Roy, there were many other reformers working at the same time. Among the members of the Brahma Samaj, there were Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and others. Inspired by Roy, Keshab, in 1870, founded the "Indian Reform Association", which launched a comprehensive programme of social and educational reforms. The programme of the Association was carried through five sections, each with a Secretary of its own. These sections were: (1) Female improvement, (2) Education of the Working Classes, (3) Cheap Literature, (4) Temperance, and (5) Charity.[1]

The Brahma Samaj inspired similar other movements in India. The most important ones were the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj. The Prarthana Samaj was founded in 1867 in Bombay, its leader being Dr. Atmaram Pandurang (1823-1898). Keshab Chandra Sen greatly influenced this Samaj; later, R.G. Bhandarkar and M.G. Ranade joined it and infused new strength in worship and social reform. It did not produce any new philosophy and literature, nor had much missionary activity.[2] Broadly speaking, this Samaj subscribed to the beliefs of the Brahma Samaj.

The Arya Samaj was a more potential force in cultural and social fields than the Prarthana Samaj. It was founded by Swami Dayananda Sarasvati in 1875 in Bombay. The Arya Samaj laid down some fundamental doctrines and rules of conduct. Three of these may be noted here:

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1. R.C. Majumdar, *et al.*, *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II (Bombay : Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), p. 104.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

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1. The (Arya) Samaj shall regard the *Vedas* alone as independently and absolutely authoritative.

2. Every member shall cheerfully contribute a hundredth part of the money he has earned towards the fund of the Samaj, the Arya Vidyalaya and the *Arya Prakash* paper.

3. The *Vedas* and ancient *Arsha granthas* shall be studied and taught in the Arya Vidyalaya, and true and right training, calculated to improve males and females, shall be imparted on Vedic lines.

In 1877, these doctrines were replaced by the Ten Principles. Instead of No. 1 above, it was simply laid down that the *Vedas* are the Books of True Knowledge which the members should study. The other nine principles merely inculcated virtue and morality to which no religion can possibly take any exception. The most characteristic feature of the Arya Samaj is the emphasis it laid upon the work of *Shuddhi*. This means the reconversions of those Hindus—millions in number—who had once been willingly or unwillingly converted into other religions like Islam or Christianity, but were now willing to come back to the fold of Hinduism. Orthodox Hinduism had always barred its door against them; the Arya Samaj threw it wide open. Two other distinctive features of the Samaj are social services like famine-relief and the spread of English education. The Dayananda Anglo-Vedic School at Lahore soon developed into a College, and has become the pattern of many educational institutions maintained by the Samaj. The curriculum in these colleges was not exactly in the original spirit of Dayananda, and so the more orthodox section founded the Gurukul at Hardwar. It is "a unique institution to perpetuate the educational ideals of ancient India."[1]

Apart from these Samajas and their distinguished followers, the names of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda will always be remembered for their unique contributions to the furtherance of the cause of social and spiritual regeneration of the

1. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

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country. They were great saints and seers and had realised God. They strove to reveal "the harmony of all religions."[1] The reputation earned by Swami Vivekanada through the Parliament of Religions at Chicago (U. S. A.) made him a world figure and raised the prestige of India and Hinduism very high. He laid the foundation of the great organization—Ramakrishna Math and Mission----which bears the name of his *guru*. It was he who made it "the greatest spiritual force in modern India."[2]

**The Missionaries**

The second factor which determined the course of education in India was the advent and activities of Christian missionaries. The ultimate aim of the missionaries has always been the proselytization of the Hindu, Muslim and other non-Christian communities in India. They did some pioneering work in the field of education and social service. The earliest among them were the three Protestant missionaries—Carey, Marshman and Ward who began their work at the Danish settlement of Serampore in 1793. They have become famous in history as the *Serampore Trio* and it must be admitted that they made an excellent combination from the missionary point of view because Carey was a great propagandist, Ward was a printer, and Marshman a school teacher. But their zeal outran among Indians by their publications entitled *Addresses to Hindus and Mahomedans*. The Company had to intervene and reaffirm its policy of religious neutrality. The missionaries and their friends began an agitation in England intended to show that the anti-missionary policy of the Company was opposed to the teachings of Christ and that its neglect of the education of the Indian people was absolutely unjustifiable. Their agitation obtained considerable support in Charles Grant (1746-1823) and led ultimately to the educational clauses of the Charter Act of 1813. Side by side with this agitation in England, some of the Company's officials in India also supported the cause of Indian education. Prominent among them was Lord Minto, who was the Governor-General of India during 1806-1813. Minto was personally an admirer of Oriental literature and felt that its study would be useful

1. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

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to the Western nations themselves. He was, therefore, very anxious that Englishman should give all possible encouragement to the study and preservation of Indian culture. In a Minute, dated 6th March, 1811, he wrote :

> It is seriously to be lamented that a nation particular ly distinguished for its love and successful cultivation of letters in other parts of the empire should have failed to extend its fostering care to the literature of the Hindoos, and to aid in opening to the learned in Europe the repositories of that literature.[1]

As a result of this combined agitation in England and India, the question of Indian education came up for discussion when the Charter of the Company became due for renewal in 1813. The subject that was discussed most was that of a suitable agency for the spread of Indian education. One party, whose view is typified in that of Charles Grant, believed that the best education for Indians was to teach them English through the missionaries. The other party, which was represented by Minto, believed that the best education for Indians was that of their own classics through the liberal endowment from the Company. The Charter Act of 1813 reconciled the views of both parties, and proved a turning-point in the history of Indian education. With it, the agitation which Grant and Wilberforce carried on for nearly twenty years came to successful conclusion ; the education of the Indian people was now included within the duties of the Company ; a comparatively large amount was annually fixed for acquisition of land in India and establishment of English schools, thereby laying the foundation of the modern educational system.

The period of twenty years between thet wo great Charters of the Company, viz. those of 1813 and 1838, was one of experiments in the field of Indian education. The Charter of 1838 made the provisions that no Indian should be debarred from holding any post under the Company by reason of his caste or creed. It also threw India open to missionaries from all countries.

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1. Quoted from *A Students' History of Education*, pp. 48-49.

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**Lord Macaulay and After**

The third factor to decide the course of education in India was Lord Macaulay's "Minute," dated 2nd February, 1835, which is a document of great historical significance. Macaulay was of the view that it was necessary and possible to make natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed. About the medium of instruction on grounds of expediency and desirability, Macaulay observed thus :

> All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover too poor and crude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.[1]

This condemnation of the spoken languages of the people naturally left the choice of a medium of instruction between Sanskrit and Arabic on the one hand and English on the other. Macaulay admittedly did not know either Arabic or Sanskrit, but he gave it as the considered opinion that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'. On the other hand, Macaulay was eloquent in praise of English and its utility in India because of its being the language of the ruling class, the language of commerce throughout the East, and because of the familiarity already gained with it by the higher classes of Indians. Macaulay strongly recommended that the object of educational policy in India should be the spread of Western learning through the medium of the English language. He also suggested that the existing institutions of Oriental learning should be closed forthwith and that funds thus released should be used for the promotion of English education.

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1. Quoted from *A Students' History of Education*, pp. 70-71.

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On March 7, 1835, the Governor-General-in-Council accorded official sanction to Macaulay's policy. Lord William Bentinck passed the resolution that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India ; and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone."[1]

But the matter did not end with the adoption of Lord Bentinck's resolution. There was a conflict brewing between the Indian languages on the one hand and English on the other. To close this conflict, Lord Auckland, the then Governor-General of India, put forth his formula of compromise, which is usually known as "Auckland's Minute". Lord Auckland shrewdly guessed that the real cause of the conflict was financial, and that each party ...Oriental and Anglican...would allow the other to work undisturbed if adequate funds were made available for both. The entire additional cost was estimated at Rs. 31,000 per annum, and Lord Auckland gladly accepted it to satisfy the Oriental party without harming the interests of the Anglicists. However, the medium of instruction continued to be English as suggested by Macaulay. Lord Auckland turned down the recommendations of Adam regarding the improvement and extension of Indigenous elementary schools. He considered Adam's Plan as "utopian and impracticable", but had he accepted it, the history of mass education in India would have been different.

Of great historical significance was Wood's Despatch of July 19, 1854, also known as *The Education Despatch of the Court of Directors*. Charles Wood was then the President of the Board of Control. The Despatch was a long document of a hundred paragraphs and deals with several questions of great educational importance. It mentions the objects of educational policy pursued by the Company, the controversy between the Anglicists and the Company, the controversy between the Anglicists and the Orientalists, and the medium of instruction. It directs that English and Indian languages should be cultivated *together* to spread

1. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

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proper education in India. It also spells out certain new schemes, such as the establishment of the Education Department in each of the five provinces, the setting up of Universities, the creation of a network of Graded Schools all over India, the increase in Grant-in-aid, the training of teachers, the employment of educated Indians, and female education. Soon after the receipt of the Despatch of 1854, every Provincial Government in India organized a department of Public Instruction under a Director. An adequate number of educational inspectors was appointed in order to assist the Director in his work. Large sums of money were made available to the Education Departments for the execution of their schemes, and the organization of the modern system of education in India began in right earnest.

The above account of the beginnings of education in India informs us how English came to stay in this country. From it we also learn that the germs of Indo-Anglian literature may be discovered in the early days of English education in India.

Under the Macauleyan dispensation (which was the backbone of English education in India), education was to be imparted to the select few in the Government institutions. But it was expected that the young men who thus received education would return to their villages and spread new education to the masses. Thus from the intellectual classes culture was to filter down and in a decade or two the Utopia of mass education would be within sight. But these expectations proved altogether illusory. The educated Indians made efficient teachers and patient clerks: some fared remarkably well as administrators and judges. There were publicists and platform orators too. People had even begun to believe that the future of India was bright and the redemption was near.

But the 'filtration theory' did not work. The hungry sheep looked up and were not fed. And also, the newly educated Indian tended to be "an absurd copy of his Western contemporary."[1] The educated community evolved into a superior caste drifted apart

1. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indo-Anglian Literature* (Bombay : The International Book House Ltd., 1943), p. 6.

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and speedily lost touch with the masses. The alien culture learned at schools and colleges made Indian youths hanker after the thrills of urban life and finally made them "incredible anachronisms" in their own once happy homes. A new generation conversed and corresponded in English. 'Indianisms' and 'Babuisms' were the order of the day. Under such circumstances, the wit of the educated Indian seesawed between his mother-tongue and English and again between the Western and Oriental civilizations. It was surely an uncongenial atmosphere which would hardly permit any healthy literary growth.

**The Birth of Indo-Anglian Literature**

Even then, many Indians quickly mastered the intricacies of the English language and made it a fit vehicle for the communication of ideas. Poetic composition was not yet possible, but letters, memoranda, monographs and translations in English appeared in due course. Presently, Indians boldly ventured into the domain of journalism; they published political and economic pamphlets, partial portraits of men of importance, even occasional skits and short stories. As more and more Indians received education in English, the Indo-Anglian found his audience increasing, and this naturally encouraged him to write more frequently.

Another factor that inspired the Indo-Anglian to attempt self-expression in English was the meritorious work of the Anglo-Indian poets. Sir William Jones, John Leyden, Henry Derozio, Meredith Parker, David Lester Richardson, Sir Edwin Arnold, Sir Alfred Lyall, Trego Webb, Lawrence Hope, and William Waterfield were among the many Anglo-Indian administrators and Orientalists who derived their poetic inspiration from traditional Indian themes, and thus added a new chapter to the story of English poetry. Indians who read the works of these poets were in turn inspired to try their own hands at poetic composition. They had before them for their models the unique achievements of the Anglo-Indians and the great masters—Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, etc.—of English literature, but spiritual sustenance was yet lacking. The Indo-Anglians of the early days were the creators of a civilization arrested on the way; their past was a hazy thing of humiliations and frustrations, and their future was an intriguing and

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uncertain thing. They were, thus, in a state of spiritual drift and rudderlessness. By and by, the clouds began to clear, and out of life-giving rains of a new culture they tried to re-discover their souls. In this great task of the re-discovery, Bengal took the lead and pulled the country out of stupor.

**Some Other Pioneers**

The earliest writings of Indo-Anglians were, as noted earlier, in prose. The Indians of a century ago or so had to talk to or appeal to their English rulers on various subjects of public importance. A speech had to be carefully prepared; a pamphlet had to be written and published. As the number of English-knowing Indians increased, publications also got diversified. The prose writings of Raja Rammohan Roy have already been noted. Roy showed, through his pioneering books, a new direction to talented people with creative urge. Beside Rammohan Roy, there were many other Indian writers of prose in those days. Their works can be seen in old libraries of the country, although their intrinsic value is almost negligible. Hassan Ali's *Observations on the Musalmans of India* (1832) is among the earliest books written by a Muslim on Muslims. P. Raja Gopaul's *Mission to Siam* (1820) and Mohan Lal's *Travels in the Punjab* (1834) are among the early of travel books or memoirs, Kavali Venkata Ramaswami's *Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets* embodies crude attempts at biography. In the realm of poetry, too, the earliest attempt by an Indian was made in 1830 when Kashiprasad Ghose's *The Shair and Other Poems* appeared. Thus English seemingly came to stay, and Indo-Anglian literature became a reality. The contribution of Bengal to the growth of Indo-Anglian literature have been immense and remarkable. The renaissance in India is mostly due to them.

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# 2

# Toru's Predecessors

In the 19th century, a number of promising writers adorned the galaxy of Indo-Anglian poetry and thereby enriched its stock and quickened the pace of its growth and expansion. The Ghoses and the Dutts and a few others gained for it 'a local habitation and a name'. Hereafter we shall make a survey of these distinguished writers one by one in order to ascertain their individual contributions to the development of Indian poetry in English.

**Henry Louis Vivian Derozio**

Henry Derozio's name comes on top among these writers. His father was a Portuguese gentleman and his mother an Indian lady. He was educated in the Dhurrumtolah Academy of David Drummond. He showed early signs of poetic talent. At the age of fourteen, Derozio entered the mercantile firm of Messrs. James Scott & Co. Soon he was transferred to Bhagalpur, where he suddenly discovered himself to be a poet. Intimacy with Nature possibly quickened his poetic sensibilities.

Derozio's early pieces drew the attention of Dr. John Grant and others who then mattered in Calcutta. At eighteen, Derozio was offered a Professorship in the Calcutta Hindu College, where he quickly gained the esteem and affection of his wards. He was one of the earliest teachers of English in the country, but, more than that, he was a constant source of inspiration to his pupils. He made them read and think for themselves. His love for his students later found an excellent poetic expression in the lines:

> Expanding like the petals of young flowers,
> I watch the gentle opening of your minds,

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And the sweet loosening of spell that binds,
Your intellectual energies and powers,
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
Their wings to try their strength. O ! how the winds
Of circumstance, and freshening April showers
Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
Of new perceptions, shed their influence,
And how you worship Truth's omnipotence !
What joyance rains upon me, when I see,
Fame in the mirror of futurity,
Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain—
And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

But this relationship was too good to last long. Derozio was misunderstood by the public, and he had to resign from his job. He then turned to journalism and began editing and publishing *The East Indian*, which did some notable work. At the age of twenty-two, Derozio died of cholera on December 23, 1831. In Mr. Oaten's words, "What English literature lost through the early death of Keats, Anglo Indian literature lost, in lesser degree, when Derozio died; for in both men there was a passionate temperament combined with unbounded sympathy with nature. Both died while their powers were not yet fully developed."

Derozio was a great lover of India. He had full knowledge of India's past. He apostrophizes the country of his birth in these moving lines:

My country, in thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,.....
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?
The eagle pinion is chained down at last,
And grovelling in the lowly dust are thou;
The minstrel hath no wreath to wreathe for thee
Save the sad story of thy misery.
... ... ... ...
And let the guerdon of my labour be,
My fallen country, one kind word for thee.

Derozio totally identified himself with India, and hence he has been rightly called the National Bard of Modern India. He was



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a true predecessor of the great Thakur Rabindranath Tagore. Derozio was not unconscious of his mission, for he said with commendable self-knowledge and humility:

> Many a hand more worthy far than mine
> Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave:
> Those hands are cold, but if those notes divine
> May be thy mortal wakened once again,
> Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.

It is really sad that the country lost Derozio so soon.

As a poet, Derozio is mainly admired for the great promise he displayed in his published work. Like Keats and Chatterton before him, like Toru and Aru after him, Derozio moved in the field of poetry for a brief period; all of them were alike, in the Shelleyan phrase, 'inheritors of unfulfilled renown.' Derozio's sonnets and poems are "competent, sustained by deep feeling and executed with good craftsmanship; again and again, he achieved that fusion between thought and expression, feeling and form, which signifies all true poetry.[1]

But Derozio's technique is mostly derivative. He wrote under the spell of Byron and Thomas Moore. His work, *The Fakir of Jungheera and Other Poems*, is full of Byronic echoes. In it the Brahmin widow, Nuleeni, is beautifully delineated. She escapes *sati* at the last moment being carried away by a robber-chief; but other sufferings now embrace her and she loses her robber chief. Thus she becomes a widow twice. She clasps the dead body of the chief frantically.

> as if she dreamed
> Of him in her embrace: but they who thought
> That life was tenanting her breast, and sought
> Some answer from her heart to hush the doubt,
> Found that its eloquence had all burned out.

Nuleeni finds her peace in the blissful union of death.

Derozio was courageous and fearless in his life. Even on his death-bed he did not lose either his equanimity or his brave

1. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Contribution to English Literature*, p. 12.

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faith. Like Donne, Derozio faced the awful mystery of death challengingly.

> But man's eternal energies can make
> An atmosphere around him, and so take
> Good out of evil, like the yellow bee
> That sucks from flowers malignant a sweet treasure,
> O tyrant fate ! thus shall I vanquish thee,
> For out of suffering shall I gather pleasure.

Derozio lived a fine life. He loved his pupils, his vocation, and his country very well. He was brave unto his last. And when he expired, his body was emtombed in the South Park Street burial-ground in Calcutta.

The noble tradition established by Henry Derozio was continued by Captain David Lester Richardson. This famous teacher came to India as an ensign in the Bengal Infantry. In 1824, ill-health forced him to return to England, where he started writing. When he came back to India in 1829, he became the editor of *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* and *The Bengal Annual.* Later on, he was appointed *aide-de-camp* to Lord William Bentinck; and in 1836 he became, through the influence of Lord Macaulay, the Principal of the Hindu College, and for the next twenty-five years he was devoted to the teaching of English literature, language and history. His *Selection from the British Poets*, published in 1840 at the suggestion of Macaulay, shows his liberal view of the range of literature. His poems and essays offer us a delightful reading. He took delight in the art of interpretation. He was a very good reader of English verse, especially that of Shakespeare.

The patrons of the Hindu College were as remarkable as the teachers there. There are frequent references in contemporary notes and letters to the quaint figure of David Hare, with long blue coat adorned with large brass buttons, moving in and out of the classrooms or attending the debates of the Academic Association. Mr. Hare's role as a patron of education in Calcutta cannot be, in any way, minimized.

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**Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873)**

Bengalis were also not lagging behind in the job of writing good English poetry. Taught by men who themselves were poets, they attempted to demonstrate their mastery of the new language and literature. The first Bengali publication in English verse belongs to the year 1830 when Kashiprasad Ghose wrote his well-known *The Shair and Other Poems.* It was a book of about 200 pages, printed by the India Gazette Press, and dedicated to Lord William Bentinck. The influence of Sir Walter Scott is apparent in this book. Its various cantos are separately dedicated to such famous contemporaries as Horace Hayman Wilson and Henry Meredith Parker. Ghose successfully captured in it the tone and spirit of Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* His work shows traces of his readings in the minor love poets of the Romantic school. Here is a piece of good imitative writing.

I would I were the zephyr sweet,
To kiss thy face and round it play;
And when thou sigh'st for love, to greet
Those sighs, and steal their sweets away,
I would I were the witnesses pure,
That clings unto thy bosom's swell;
That others I'd to madness line,
While I myself there safely dwell.

Ghose's book contains several poems on Indian festivals after the manner of Sir William Jones' hymns to the Hindu deities. The verse is "agreeably imitative and everywhere pleasing".[1] There is little originality either in the form of the poems or in their themes. However, Richardson's delightful anthology of prose and poetry, *The Bengal Annal*, published on seven occasions between 1833 and 1836 contains some pieces of Ghose. This is sufficient proof that in his own day the Bengali poet had earned reputation as a writer of English verse.

**Rajnarain Dutt**

Many young writers of the day looked to Richardson for encouragement and patronage. Such one was Rajnarain Dutt, who dedicated his work to Richardson. Rajnarain Dutt wrote

1. T. O. D. Durn, *The Bengal Book of English Verse* (Bombay: Longmans, 1918), p. 5.

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*Osmyn, an Arabian Tale* (1841), a lengthy poem in heroic couplets. This poem is partly pleasingly reminiscent of an antique manner of presentation:

> What thundering sound upon the midnight wind
> Comes louder and yet louder from behind?
> The caverned echoes wake; the vaults of stone
> Relieve the chattering tramp in varied tone
> Who comes so late and armed, at deadlong speed;
> With sable turbon, cloak and barbed steed?

It is actually nothing short of a lengthy experiment in pentameters.

**Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873)**

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It was left to Michael Madhusudan Dutt to write something substantial and lasting. Born in 1824 and educated in the Hindu College, he was the favourite pupil of Richardson, who encouraged him to authorship. Madhusudan Dutt accepted Christianity and migrated to Madras in search of a job and edited for some time an English newspaper in that metropolis. He married a European lady, qualified for the bar in England and tried to make a living as a lawyer. He led a chequered career and died in the prime of his life and at the height of his powers in a Calcutta hospital. His long metrical romance in English was *The Captive Ladie*, an attempt to tell the story of Prithvi Raj, the Rajput King of Delhi. It was published in 1849 and won at once the hearts of literary people. Madhusudan's other works in English include *Visions of the Past* in blank verse, *Ratnavali* (1858), translations of *Sarmista* (1859), and the farce, *Is This Called Civilization ?*(1871).

During the latter part of his life, Madhusudan wrote mainly in Bengali, and his fame solely rests on the Bengali epic, *Meghnad-Badha*, of which an English rendering was published in 1879.

Madhusudan inspired many young poets to write. In his "In Memoriam," the poet Nabokissen Ghose (Ram Sharma) wrote as follows:

> Hushed is the tuneful voice that thrilled the soul,
> Silent the lyre whose swelling notes did roll
> In streams of music sweet that did impart
> A life—a soul even to the dullest heart!

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And Sri Aurobindo also paid tributes to the poet. In his moving commemoration ode he wrote:

> No human hands such notes ambrosial moved;
> These accents are not of the imperfect earth;
> Rather, the god was voiceful in their birth,
> The god himself of the enchanting flute,
> The god himself took up thy pen and wrote.

**The Dutt Family**

Even during the days of Madhusudan, the Dutt family had distinguished itself for its literary and creative activities in the whole of Bengal. In the year 1851, *Hur Chunder Dutt* produced in Calcutta a small volume of poetry called *Fugitive Pieces*, many of which were reprinted twenty years later in his second volume entitled *Lotus Leaves*. Both works are slight, but they contain a pleasing variety of themes drawn from Indian history. *The Dutt Family Album* (1870) containing about 200 poems was written by Govin Chunder Dutt, Omesh Chunder Dutt, Greece Chunder Dutt, and Hur Chunder Dutt, three of whom were the sons of Rasamoy Dutt, the Secretary of the Hindu College Committee and a Commissioner of the Court of Requests. The volume was published in London by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. For a student of Bengali literature, it is a work of great interest and importance. In the Preface, the joint authors declare it to be the piece of 'a curiosity' and one of 'foreigners, natives of India ... educated out of India.' In fact, this *Album* is the first to 'represent the older school of Bengali poetry, in English'. It was actually the complication of men who received inspiration from Captain Richardson and whose academic career began and ended in the Hindu College. The literary merits of the work, judged in the light of the special circumstances of its production, are considerable. The quality of the verse, the range and variety of theme, the command of various metrical forms, and the restraint and dignity of the style are everywhere pleasing. The most notable of the four writers were Govin Chunder Dutt and Omesh Chunder Dutt, who produced 66 and 73 poems respectively out of a total of 197. Indian history, legend and landscape, the picturesque elements of the Christian and the Hindu faith, and such ideas as would attract an Oriental in his first intercourse with the West, provide the subjects of their poems.

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**Govin Chunder Dutt**

The contributions made by Govin Chunder to the *Album* were primarily of a didactic character. More than any of his collaborators, Govin was touched by Christian sentiment, and found his themes either in the Christian theology, or in narratives from the Scriptures. He had a wonderful command of an intricate stanza-form when he wrote on the subject of Wordsworth's poetry and concluded as follows :

Hail, ye Rydalian laurels that have grown
Untended by the Poet's calm abode,
And in the foot-paths that he ever trod.
Wrapt in deep thought, at evening time, alone ;
... ... ... ... ...
A crown of amaranth by her own hands made.

The *Album* throws light on the atmosphere of Govin's house, an ideal atmosphere by all means for Aru Dutt and Toru Dutt.

**Omesh Chunder Dutt**

Omesh Chunder Dutt was attracted mainly by the stirring incidents of Indian legend. He wrote with ease and contributed the largest number of poems to the *Album*. He provided much interesting verse] for such periodicals as Mukerjee's *Magazine*. It is unfortunate that his "undoubted talent for narrative did not find greater scope in the abundant historical material of India"[1] He might have written a fine body of heroic verse, had he continued such studies in Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan* as inspired his vigorous poem, "The Chief of Pokurna". One may mark the beauty and the power of description in the following stanza of this poem :

Oh ! gaily in a golden shower
The setting sun-light falls,
Upon the waste of glinting sand
Which girds Pokurna's walls.

The poet had a wonderful faculty of observation and could describe natural scenes and sights with great charm and command.

1. Dunn, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

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The other collaborators of *The Dutt Family Album* were Greece Chunder Dutt and Hur Chunder Dutt. The latter has already been examined, and his part in the *Album* was slight and amounted to eleven poems in all.

**Greece Chunder Dutt**

Greece Chunder Dutt contributed 47 pieces to the *Album.* In 1887, he published a separate volume of poems entitled *Cherry Blossoms.* In this volume several earlier contributions to the *Album* were reprinted, but the greater number of poems were fresh. The volume was carefully produced and contained much that was of value and attraction. The author had specialized in the difficult sonnet form. The subjects of these poems are as varied as India. The solemnity of the sonnets is relieved by the more lively measures of the historical and legendary poems. At times one comes across heroic stanzas in the volume that might delight the heart of a school-boy, such as the "Samarsi".

> Samarsi the bold is the pride of his clan,
> But he owns not an acre in broad Rajasthan ;
> ... ... ... ...
> And Samarsi the bold is an exile from home.

With this volume of Greece Chunder, the poetical efforts of the gifted quartet of relatives may be said to have reached the highest peak of achievement.

Aru Dutt and Toru Dutt were fortunate enough to have been born in the renowned Dutt family at Rambagan (Calcutta). They were the worthy daughters of Govin Chunder, a poet and linguist of fame, and Kshetramoni, a gentle lady of refined sensibility. Besides contributing to the *Album* (as noted above), Govin had also published *The Loyal Hours* (1876) and *Cherry Stones* (1881), both containing good English verses. Mrs. Govin was well-versed in English and Bengali. She was mainly responsible in giving a fine taste to her daughters in literary performance. She had translated *The Blood of Jesus* into Bengali. Born and bred in such a cultured family, it was natural for Aru and Toru to take up serious literary activities.

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**Aru Dutt**

Aru (1854-1874) translated only eight poems from French for inclusion in *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, which is largely the work of her younger sister, Toru Dutt. Thus, Toru has done no independent work. But she was a very good painter. She died of consumption at the age of twenty. On her death Toru wrote to her Cambridge friend, Miss Mary Martin in the following manner : "The Lord has taken dear Aru from us. It is a sore trial for us, but His will be done. We know he dooth all things for our good...."[1]

1. See Harihar Das, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* (London : Oxf. Univ. Press, 1921), p. 65.

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# 3

# A Biographical Sketch

Aru's younger sister, Toru Dutt, too, prematurely passed away. The life of Toru Dutt is a mixed story of sunshine and sorrow, beauty and tragedy, success and repentance. If her literary works fill us with wonder and delight, her early death leaves us sad and repenting.

**Her Life**

Born in a Hindu family on March 4, 1856, Toru Dutt was brought up by her parents with all care and affection. She had a rich and respectable ancestry. Attracted by the glamour of the West, the Dutts accepted Christianity. Then Toru was six, Aru was eight, and their brother Abju was eleven. The conversion of faith caused a temporary estrangement between the parents, as may be inferred from Govin's poem addressed to his wife :

Nay part not so——one moment stay,
Repel me not with scorn,
Like others, wilt thou turn away,
And leave me quite forlorn ?
Wilt thou too join the scoffing crowd.
The cold, the heartless, and the proud,
Who curse the hallowed worn,
When, daring idols to disown,
I knelt before the Saviour's throne ?

Mrs. Govin, however, seems to have reconciled herself to the changed situation, and indeed to have become "an ardent Christian."[1]

1. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, 2nd ed. (Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1973), p. 56.

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Toru was frail and fragile in her physical appearance. When she was a little girl, her father wrote of her as follows :

> Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,
> Self-willed and shy—ne'er heeding that I call,
> Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
> To bird or cat,——but most intelligent.....

He also wrote of his loving son thus :

> Most loving is my eldest, and I love him most ;
> Almost a man in seeming, yet a child.....

and thus of Aru :

> My next, the beauty of our home is meek,
> Not so deep-loving haply, but less wild
> Than her dear brother ;——brow and blushing cheek
> Her nature shows serene, and pure, and mild
> As evening's early star.....

The children had a private tutor, but Govin himself took a hand in their education. The first calamity that befell the family was the death of Abju at the age of 14, in 1865. For their consolation, the sisters began to read *Paradise Lost* repeatedly till it became a part of their poetic make-up. This is responsible for Toru's poetry abounding in "fair phrase and sonority."[1] She had also read Shakespeare well.

In 1869, the Dutt family left for Europe, and the two girls attended a French school at Nice. A year later, the family went to London, where Toru and Aru took lessons in music and became "good musicians".[2] Living in a furnished house here, they started translation into English. Their cousin, Romesh Chander Dutt, was then in London, preparing for the Civil Services examinations. He used to call on them every now and then and remove their loneliness. Toru's knowledge of French and English was "astonishing".[3]

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1. H.H. Anniah Gowda, "Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as Poets," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 9, No. 1, (1968), 19.
2. Jyotis Chandra Dass Gupta, "Toru Dutt," *National Biography for India*, 4 (1914), 307.
3. Margaret Macnicol, *Poems by Indian Women* (Calcutta : Y.M.C.A. Press, and London : O.U.P., 1923), p. 37.

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So intimately did she identify herself with everything that was French that French became her favourite language and France the country of her election. In the words of Sir Edmund Gosse, "To the end of her days Toru was a better French than English scholar. She loved France best, she knew its literature best, she wrote its language with more perfect elegance."[1]

In 1871, the Dutt family moved to Cambridge where both the sisters attended the lecturers for women, and made friends with Miss Mary Martin, who was to be Toru's life-long friend and the recipient of most of her letters.

In 1873, the entire family returned to Calcutta after a lapse of four years. Now the sisters plunged into "a feverish dream of intellectual effort and imaginative production."[2] They also divided their time between the city-house at Rambagan and the garden-house at Baugmaree. But the literary strain sustained by Aru proved to be fatal for her and she, aged 20, succumbed to consumption. It was a heart-rending calamity for Toru and Govin Chunder.

Toru along with her father started studying Sanskrit in 1875. She now made arrangements for the publication of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, which appeared in 1876. In the meantime, she began hoping to 'bring out another *Sheaf*, not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit Fields'. The following extracts from her letters to Mary tell an inspiring tale about the circumstances in which she undertook her studies in Sanskrit and about the courses therein :

> (1) I have now nothing to do, so Papa and I are going to take up Sanskrit. It is a difficult language, and it is hard to learn it properly in less than 6 or 7 years, but I will try my best. My grand father, Papa's father, used to know and understand Sanskrit like a pundit ; and he only learnt it for two or three years when he was forty-two or forty three years of age ; so I hope, my case will not be hopeless.[3]

1. Edmund W. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir," *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (London : Kegan Paul & Co., 1882), p. xii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
3. Harihar Das, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 112.

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(2) We have begun Sanskrit : the pundit is very pleased with our eagerness to learn, and hopes great things from our assiduity. It is a very difficult language, as I said before, especially the grammar, which is dreadful. It is not so difficult to read and understand it, for one who knows Bengali.[1]

(3) We are going on with our Sanskrit lessons. When we have finished the book we are reading now, we shall take up Valmiki's *Ramayana*.[2]

(4) The Sanskrit is going on tolerably well ; we are now reading the *Ramayana*.[3]

(5) Our Sanskrit is going on but slowly. We are now reading extracts from the *Mahabharata*.[4]

(6) We are now reading *Sakuntala* in Sanskrit.[5]

(7) I am translating some small Sanskrit pieces.[6]

(8) I hope I shall be able to bring out another, 'sheaf', not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit Fields ;.....I have only as yet gathered two ears.....[7]

From these extracts we infer that within a space of barely ten months Toru Dutt learnt Sanskrit, laved in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and *Sakuntala*, and translated a few pieces from the original Sanskrit into English verse. Toru was also well-read in the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavadgita*. These readings gave "her woman's imagination free play."[8]

By 1877, Toru's health had run down; she was ill, very ill, and had recurrent attacks of fever, cough spasm and blood-spitting. She was obliged to keep within doors, and was so weak that she could not even write her letters. It is a harrowing tale

1. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
8. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, p. 63.

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indeed. On August 30, 1877, Toru breathed her last, leaving behind her parents totally deserted and depressed. Govin reported peaceful death of his dear daughter to Mary Martin as follows: "Her end here was very peaceful and happy, and her mother and myself will never, never forget the expression that was on her face when all was over. Such a glory there was on it."[1] Toru was buried at the C. M. S. Cemetery in Calcutta, near her loved brother and sister.

**Her Work**

Toru appeared in print for the first time in December, 1874, when her first essay secured a place in *The Bengal Magazine*. The same magazine brought out one more essay by Toru Dutt in the same December number. One of these essays was on Leconte de Lisle, and the other on Henry Vivian Derozio. Both essays were of a good length.

In June and July, 1875, appeared *A Scene from Contemporary History*, which contained two translations in prose made by Toru Dutt from two speeches delivered, not long ago, in the French Legislative Assembly. One of these speeches was by Victor Hugo in which he, in 1851, vehemently opposed the proposal to bring about certain constitutional changes designed to make Louis Napoleon the virtual king of France; and the other was delivered by M. Thiers, in 1870, strongly objecting to the proposal of declaring war by France on the King of Prussia. Toru's "unique linguistic abilities"[2] are evidenced in these translations. In several passages she aptly expressed, with freedom of language, the thought of the speaker. She fails, however, to do so uniformly and some of her renderings are not as happy or suitable as they should have been. But this can be realised only by a very scrupulous reader.

On November 23, 1875, Toru informed her British friend, "I have finished my book of French poetry translated into English.[3]

1. Harihar Das, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 311.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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The manuscript was then shown to a number of publishing firms, but 'Calcutta publishers were', according to Toru, 'a very timid class of people, not at all enterprising and they are besides more given to the sale of books than publishing new ones.' And so, it was to be printed only and not published, in 1876, under the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (more details about it will follow in the next chapter).

*A Sheaf* was the only volume that Toru saw through the press in her life. After her death, her father examined her papers and found, among other things, an unfinished romance in English, entitled *Bianca*, or *The Young Spanish Maiden*, and a complete French novel called *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*.

*Bianca* was published serially in *The Bengal Magazine* between January and April 1878. The circumstances of the heroine of this unfinished tale, Bianca Garcia, the younger and only surviving daughter of a Spanish gentleman who had settled in an English village, have some touching resemblances with those of the creator of the romance. The plot of *Bianca* is tragic, and the story starts with the death of Enez, Bianca's elder sister, and the funeral on a cold February day. Bianca and her father mourn the death:

> They lowered the coffin. The father stood silent, his eyes half-closed, his lips trembling; was he praying ? Was he weeping? Bianca's tears fell silently, drop by drop ; some times a deep-drawn sigh shook her light frame ; she kept down the sobs in that way.[1]

Bianca is overcome with grief and Martha, her Scottish maid, persuades her to try and forget the loss. After a year Walter Ingram, her dead sister's fiance, wants to marry her. Ingram is "a rather handsome young man of about twenty-four, with a frank countenance, fair hair and pale blue eyes," and in stature of "the middle height."[2] In the meantime, her own father has died. Ingram still loves Inez, and they meet at this time Lady Moore

1. Toru Dutt, *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* : Chapter I, quoted from *The Bengal Magazine*, VI (August 1877-July 1878), 265.
2. *Bianca*, Chapter II; *Ibid.*, p. 271.

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and her son and daughter. Bianca falls in love with the son, Lord Moore. There are family objections to the marraige with Lord Moore, who goes off to the Crimean War. But before his departure, Lord Moore takes off a small ring and slids it on Bianca's marriage finger, saying "You will wear that for my sake, darling, and if I ever return ."[1] Here the story breaks off. A footnote by Govin Chunder at the end of the story runs as under:

> The gentle hand that had traced the story thus far.....the hand of Miss Toru Dutt,...left off here. Was it illness that made the pen drop from the weary fingers ? I do not know. I think not. The sketch was a first attempt probably, and abandoned. I am inclined to think so because the novel left in the French language is very much superior indeed to this fragment and is complete. Other fragments there are both in prose and verse but mostly rough hewn and unpolished.[2]

Toru did not carry this fragment on because she might have felt that it was "too gloomy to continue,"[3] and began her French novel.

*Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers* was published in 1879 by a Paris firm, Didier. The French authoress, Mlle. Clarisse Bader, looked after the publication of the novel, and wrote an Introduction. It was dedicated to his Excellency Lord Lytton, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, with 'temoignage de profonde recomaissance.' It is a successful and complete novel, and, according, to one, "an extraordinary feat, without precedent."[4]

It is remarkable that in recent years two complete Bengali translations of this novel have appeared, one in 1949 by Rajkumar

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1. *Bianca*, Chapter IX; *Ibid.*, p. 381.
2. *Idem.*
3. Padmini Sengupta, *Toru Dutt* (New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi : 1968), p. 79.
4. Radhakamal Mukerjee, "Great Indian Women of the Nineteenth Century : Toru Dutt," *Great Women of India*, ed., Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (Mayavati Almora, Himalayas: Advaita Ashram, 1953), p. 402.

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Mukherjee and the other in 1958 by Prithwindranath Mukhopadhyaya. The former has also published a study of Toru Dutt in Bengali, *Kavi Toru Dutt* (1959).

*Le Journal*, which consists of extracts from the diary of a French Catholic girl, ranges over a period of a year and a half, a period beginning with her leaving the convent school, where she had been educated, and ending with her premature death within the first and death is inserted as an epilogue to the diary. The novel begins with 'the pretty prattle of a young girl who has known no sorrow and whose heart is filled with pure and simple joys.' Margrerite d' Arvers is the only child of her parents...a retired General and his wife, who are now living in Brittany. She returns home in time to celebrate her fifteenth birthday. At her birthday party she meets friends whom she had known in her childhood: Madame Goserell with her two sons, Dunoins and Gaston. Three days later, a young officer, Louis Lefevre, comes on a visit to her home. He is the orphan son of old friends of Margrerite's parents. A glimpse is given of the way in which Margrerite fills up her days: in walks with her father, in tending her domestic pets, and in visiting the poor and aged in the neighbouring village. She obtains a place for one of the village girls, jeannette, as lady's maid to the Countess, and, later on goes herself to visit at the chatean, where the Countess accords her a warm welcome. She there meets her hostess's brother, Colonel Desclee. Another trip which she takes is to Paris, to stay with her great-aunt Genevieve. Marguerite's parents would fain see her united to Louis, but when he solicits her, she refuses him. She has fallen in love with Count Dunois, and the Countess one day discovers the fact and rejoices. Dunois and Gaston, however, are both secretly enamoured of Jeannette, and in a fit of madness Dunois kills his brother. Only on recovering sanity does he become aware of his crime and also of Marguerite's love, and is condemned to penal servitude. In another fit of insanity, he commits suicide, and the Countess goes mad. Marguerite falls seriously ill. She feels that it is her duty to marry Louis and please her parents. Mark the following dialogue between Marguerite and her mother:



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"Do you love him now, my child?"
"Yes, Mother."
"More than any body else?"[1]
"Yes, Mother"

The sisterly affection that Marguerite had at the outset for Louis develops into a deep love, and the end of the story is taken up with an account of her happy days of married life at Nice, her return home and death there, leaving a little son behind. The end of Marguerite is really very pathetic:

> "Louis, are you there?" she said, unaware that it was he who was holding her. "I don't see you." He bent down towards her. "Ah ! Now I can see you, my love" she said with her charming smile. Then she passed her little thin hands over her husband's face and kissed him. Her eyes were wide open; her head fell back upon the pillow. "Give me our son, Louis."
>
> He brought the child close to her face. She looked at him for a long time, them kissed him tenderly and said, "He is sleeping ; I wanted to see his limpid eyes once, before we part, but never mind ; put him back in his cradle, and take care that he doesn't wake up". When Louis had put the child in the cradle, she took the hand of the young father in hers and whispered, It's quite dark. Come closer, my love. closer" she pressed her husband's hand. "I'm tired," she murmured, "so tired...I am going to sleep now. Kiss me, my beloved, before I sleep."
>
> He kissed her.
>
> "God take us into his protection !" she sighed. Such, from childhood, had been her last prayer before sleeping. She closed her eyes; her lips parted slightly, and her pure soul flew thence to the bosom of God, and Marguerite slept the sleep of death.[2]

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1. Toru Dutt, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (Paris : Didier, 1879); translated by Prithwindra Mukherjee and quoted from *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (December 15, 1963), p. 43.
2. *Ibid*, quoted from *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (December 29, 1963), p. 27.

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The plot of the novel is simple and elicits the reader's interest throughout. The story is told very skilfully. The novel, though originally written in French, is very different from the ordinary French novel. It has no ghastly details, no sordid or vulgar incidents, such as we often find in a French novel of the same nature. It was received with applause everywhere. James Darmesteter, Adrien Desprez, Garcin de Tassy (the eminent Orientalist) and many other French lieratteurs and critics praised it whole-heartedly. England also joined in the chorus of praise, as is shown from the following extract :

> There is every reason to believe that in intellectual power Toru Dutt was one of the most remarkable women that ever lived. Had George Sand or George Eliot died at the age of twenty one, they would certainly not have left behind them proof of application or of originality superior to these bequeathed to us by Toru Dutt; and we discover little of merely ephemeral precocity in the attainments of this singular girl.[1]

It is indeed a book which is a marvel from the linguistic point of view. Though not an autobiography in the strict sense of the term, it reveals much of the inner life of Toru Dutt.

Toru's genius reached its culmination in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, which was published in 1882 by Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co., London. There are nine ballads and legends in this volume. They are: "Savitri", "Lakshman," "Jogadhya Uma," "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind," "Dhruva," "Buttoo," "Sindhu," "Prahlad," and "Sita". Apart from these, the volume also contains a few delightful poetic pieces in a separate section called "The Miscellaneous Poems." Sir Edmund Gosse wrote an "Introductory Memoir" to this collection of poems, and expressed the opinion that it "will be ultimately found to constitute Toru's chief legacy to posterity."[2] A reprint of *Ancient Balladas* was brought out in 1927 by the same publishers. The first Indian reprint of the

1. *The Saturday Review*, August 28, 1879.
2. Edmund Gosse, "Introductory Memoir," *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, p. XXII.

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book was issued by Messrs. Kitabistan, Allahadad, in 1940 with an "Introductory Memoir" by Dr. Amaranatha Jha (for more details, see the ensuing chapter).

Toru was also an excellent writer of letters. Most of her letters were directed to her Cambridge friend, Miss Mary Martin, and some to the renowned French authoress Mlle. Clarisse Bader, whose love and admiration she won through correspondence. She wrote, in all, 53 letters to Mary from India. Earlier, she had, in the opinion of her biographer, Harihar Das, dropped a few letters from England and France to her relatives in India, but additional light expected to be thrown on the life and attainments of the poetess is not in our possession. The letters to Mary Martin suffice to reveal all that is feminine and childlike in Toru. They are collected in Harihar Das's monumental book, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. Mlle. Bader has spoken of Toru's letters in the following manner: "Her letters revealed a frankness, sensibility, and charming goodness and simplicity which endeared her to me, and showed the native qualities of the Hindu woman developed and transformed by the Christian civilization of Europe."[1]

In addition to these works and letters, Toru Dutt as well as her elder sister, as reported by Govin Chunder in his "Prefatory Memoir," kept diaries of their travels in Europe. It is a pity that no portion of these diaries has ever been published, and it is doubtful that they can now ever be traced.

**Conclusion**

Toru Dutt was a pioneer in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. It is customary to begin a survey of Indo-Anglian poetry with her and indeed, she was "the first authentic Indo-Anglian."[2] Coming as she did in the wake of the cultural renaissance, the seeds of which were so assiduously sown by Derozio, Madhusudan, and, above all, Rammohan Roy, Toru wrote, in the few years she was destined to live, some exquisite poetry, displaying an amazing maturity of mind and feeling. Her poetic output is meagre, but splendid. One is only left speculating about her extraordinary talent and creative fertility which could have enabled her to reach the unexpected height of poetic achievements, had the race of her life not been so quickly run.

1. Quoted from *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 288.
2. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indo-Anglian Literature*, p. 9.

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# 4

# A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields

This was the only work which Toru saw printed and privately published during her lifetime. On its appearance, a copy was sent to the editor of the *Examiner* (London) for review. Prof. W. Minto was then the editor of this paper. Prof. Minto thrust the copy of *A Sheaf* into the unwilling hands of Sir Edmund Gosse for a review. The book belied the expectations of Sir Gosse and he reviewed it very sympathetically, though he deplored that it contained no preface or introduction.

*A Sheaf* was printed by the Saptahik Sambad Press at Bhowanipore in March 1876 and dedicated to Mrs Govin Chunder Dutt (her mother). It sold out quickly. In May 1878, her father brought out its second edition with a Prefatory Memoir by him. This edition also exhausted within two years, and the third one followed in 1880 published by M/s. Kegan Paul & Co., London.

**Editions of the Book**

The first edition was a large octavo volume of 234 pages (including 40 pages of Notes). Out of a total of 165 poems, 8 were by Aru Dutt and the remainder by Toru Dutt. These were all verse translations in English from the original French covering some seventy Parnassian poets. In all probability, the copies despatched for foreign reviews, including those of Sir Edmund Gosse and Andre Theuriet, were paperbacks, since they were easier to pack and post. Some 44 fresh translations were added to the first edition at the time of the release of the second impression of the book, raising the total of poems to 209 in all. Govin Chunder's Prefatory Memoir to this edition is really heart-touching, especially when he gives a pen-portrait of the two sisters now in the jaws of Death. He writes thus :

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> The great ambition of the sisters was to publish a novel anonymously, which Toru should write, and Aru who was far more deft at the pencil should illustrate. Toru's part of the contract has been faithfully fulfilled. I have before me her manuscript. It is in the form of a diary written in French by a young lady. The scene is laid in France, and the characters are all French men and women. I shall publish it probably hereafter. Aru did not live to complete her part of the undertaking.[1]

The novel hinted at here is *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers.* The hard labour of Toru Dutt was ultimately rewarded when in 1880 a British publisher ventured to publish it.

Toru began translating French poems into English when she was yet in England, and continued it after her return to India. She used to publish them in the "Poet's Corner" of the *Bengal Magazine* from time to time. Her final contribution to this well-known magazine was a rendering of A. Barbier's "La Cavale", which her father had discovered among her manuscripts after her premature and sad demise and which he had sent for publication therein.

**Reviews of the Book**

The reviews of *A Sheaf* were generally fine and favourable. The reviewers welcomed the volume in such papers and periodicals as the *Hindu Patriot*, the *Englishman*, and the *Indian Charivari.* About the notice in the Englishman, Toru wrote that it was "generous and candid, pointing out some mistakes in the versifying, but altogether very favourable and sincere, with some extracts from the book, namely *To Papa* by Musset, and the last sonnet addressed to Papa."[2] The *Indian Mirror* and the *Madras Standard* were the next to notice the existence of the book. The latter took Toru for a gentleman, and the poetess was 'rather amused' and 'perhaps a little flattered' at this mistake. Many other good notices of the book appeared in the *Bengal Magazine*, *Bengalee*, and the *Friend of India.*

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1. Govin Chunder Dutt, "Prefatory Memoir," *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (Bhowanipore : The Saptahik Sambad Pr., 1878), p. xi.
2. Quoted in Harihar Das's *The Life and Letters of Toru*, p. 143.

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The foreign presses were not lagging behind in noticing the book. In August 1876, the *Examiner* of London published a two column review of it by Sir Gosse. It is partly quoted below :

> This remarkable volume seems expressly arranged to tantalize the sympathetic reviewer. It is roughly printed, and bound in paper, comes, too, from an obscure Indian Press and by no smallest preface or introduction designs to give us the least inkling of its genesis.... It is obvious, then, that to have translated pieces from the best French poets, such as might come under a pupil's notice in any ordinary school anthology, into English prose, would have been a respectable feat for an Indian girl. What, then, is our surprise, to find Miss Toru Dutt translating, in every case into the measure of the original, no less than 166 poems, some of them no less intricate in form than perplexing in matter. This amazing feat she has performed with a truly brilliant success.[1]

In one of her letters to Mary Martin, Toru comments on Sir Gosse's review of the *Sheaf*. She says, "It is rather a long notice, full two columns, and very generous and frank and a little funny too. It is the best notice that has been written on the *Sheaf*, and I thank the reviewer, whoever he may be, most heartily."[2]

E.J. Thompson also reviewed the book, and observed : "Toru Dutt remains one of the most astonishing women that ever lived, a woman whose place is with Sappho and Emily Bronte, fiery and unconquerable of soul as they ; and few statements, one feels, can more triumphantly sustain fair examination than this. The remarkable verses in which she chronicles the dream that foreran death go to strengthen this same conviction of power and fire. ... These poems are sufficient to place Toru Dutt in the small class of women who have written English verse that can stand. The *Sheaf* is remarkable after other fashion. Merely to have translated so much and so well from one alien tongue into another must be a feat hardly paralleled ; and the book contains much work that is individual and beautiful."[3] Thompson was all praise for Toru's critical

1. *The Examiner*, dated 26th August, 1876.
2. Harihar Das, *op, cit.* p. 220.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 344-45.

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acumen reflected in her scholarly notes on individual poets and poems. The French papers like *Courier de*[1] *Europe* and *Revue des Deux Mondes* published decent reviews of the book by Chatelain and Andre Theuriet respectively.

**A Critique**

*A Sheaf* mostly represents the Romantic school of French poets, the school which sought to express freely the thought and feeling of individuals in a moving diction and metre. In France, the main exponents of this school were Victor Hugo (the poet) and Sainte-Beuve (the critic). Others to adorn the galaxy of this school were Verlaine, Gautier, Nerval, Borel, Deschamps, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, Soulary, Bouilhet, etc. Although the dominant concern of Toru in this volume is the translation of the French Romantic poets, the poets of other ages are not completely ignored. She, thus, gives us a few pieces from the poets of the transition period, such as Chenier, Courier, Beranger, and Lamartine. She even goes back farther, and gives poems of Parny and de Florian of the 18th century, of Searron and P. Corneille of the 17th century, and of du Bartas and du Bellay of the 16th century. Besides these, Toru translates the work of those poets who stood a little apart from the Romantic school, namely, de Vigny, de Musset, Barbier, Brizeux, Moreau, Dupont, Mme. Ackermann, and Mme. Valmore. She also includes some pieces by Heine, a Germany-born poet. Taken together, the *Sheaf* is a reliable companion to modern French poetry.

Of all the poets rendered in this volume, Victor Hugo holds the most important place with 31 pieces figuring in it. Evidently, Hugo was Toru's favourite and she allowed more space to him than to anyone else. Her renderings have succeeded in capturing the charm and delicacy of Hugo's French poems and the vigour and variety of his diction and metre. Hugo's multipronged personality peeps through them.

F. de Gramont is represented in the *Sheaf* with 17 poems and J. Soulary with 14. Their immaculate skill in sonneteering induced the translatress to give them this representation. Out of 17 pieces by Gramont selected for translation, 15 are sonnets. One of his best sonnets is "Sonnet-Freedom." Harihar Das has also spoken of Toru's partiality for "the translation of sonnets."[1]

1. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

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Among other poets, T. Gautier and Sainte-Beuve are represented by six and five pieces each, whereas Barbier, Lisle, Mme. Valmore and Lamartine by four pieces each. Other poets are represented by three or two or only one.

A cursory glance at the book convinces the reader that Toru was not doing her work with any well-planned method in mind, and that is why she did not allot space to individual poets according to their established positions in French poetry. Thus Gramont is over-represented, while Lamartine, whose place is beside Hugo, does not receive adequate attention, although the translatress thought of Lamartine and Laprade highly. Only four of Lamartine's poems and one of Laprade's are given in this volume.

Thematically speaking, many of the poems in the *Sheaf* are patriotic in content, while many others deal with multiple things—doves and butterflies and swallows, homely joys and simple scenes, kindness and bravery, child life and ideal manhood.[1] The romantic side of life appealed to her imagination most. One such poem is Gensoul's "My Village", which is partly given below :

> Oh fair sky of my native land,
> How much I miss thee here !
> And thee, oh home — on sweet retreat !
> I ever held so dear.
> Canst thou not, Sun, that openest now
> The summer's treasures free,
> Give back to me my sky and home,
> My life and gaiety ?
>
> (p. 40)

Hugo's "After the Battle", Gramont's "Sonnet-Freedom", and Berat's "My Normandy" are pregnant with patriotic instincts.

But Toru was more sensitive towards pathetic subjects—those that spoke of "separation and loneliness, exile and captivity, illusion and dejection, loss and bereavement, declining seasons and untimely death."[2] In many pieces we witness a lingering note of pathos and frustration. Such are the pieces of Mme. Valmore, de Musset, de Vigny, de Nerval, de Lisle, Dupont, etc.

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1. A.N. Dwivedi, *Toru Dutt* (New Delhi : A-H, 1977), p. 137.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

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The *Sheaf* being the work of a girl still in her teens may perhaps not interest the average reader of poetry, nor can it be expected to have attained perfection in the art of versification. But here and there we do see flashes of delicate fancy and firm hold on the subject. It may have lapses of rhyme and rhythm on and off, but it also shows the power of a true genius at work. Sir Gosse took it to be "certainly the most imperfect of Toru's writings," but he, too, conceded that "it is not the least interesting."[1]

Harihar Das thinks that Toru's command of the English language is 'wonderful' here, and that "it is difficult to realise that the book is not the work of English writer".[2] Mlle, Clarisse Bader, the French authoress, also remarks that Toru 'has taken her rank and place among the writers of England'. No doubt, the book has certain 'limping lines' and a few 'archaic phrases', but such defects are not too many. Very often, Toru has succeeded marvellously in capturing the metre and spirit of the original French. She however, does not hesitate to give a twist or twang to the original if the occasion so demanded. Thus, Hugo's "Napoleon le Petit" is a good specimen of her work, and her substitution of 'Tom Thumb' for 'le Petit' is really ingenious and satisfying.

At times Toru completely rejected the words, phrases and sentences of the original. As an illustration, we give here after the first stanza of Beranger's "My Vocation" :

A waif on this earth,
Sick, ugly and small,
Condemned from my birth
And rejected by all,
From my lips broke a cry,
Such as angiush may wring,
Sing, — said God in reply,
Chant poor little thing. (pp. 9—10)

Its French original reads thus :

Jete sur cette boule,
Laid, chetif, et souffrant ;
Etouffe dans la foule,
Faute d'etre assez grand ;

1. Sir E. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir", *Ancient Ballads*, p. XV.
2. H. Das, *op, cit.*, p. 301.

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Une plainte touchante
De ma bouche sortit ;
Le bon Dieu me dit ; Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit !

(p. 236)

In Toru's hands, the third and fourth lines suffered a sea-change, and 'Une plainte touchante' of the fifth line became 'Such as anguish may wring'. However, her weakness as a translatress is also quite apparent here, especially when she substitutes 'Sing... Chant' for 'Chante, Chante'. Had she given us 'Sing... ...Sing' in place of 'Sing...Chant', it would have been a welcome change at an appropriate place, but Toru missed at the crucial moment.

Taken as a whole, the *Sheaf* contains some really charming songs in it, such as Hugo's "Lines", Beranger's "My Vocation", and Berat's "My Normandy". Beranger's "My Vocation" was, when Toru was alive, prescribed for the Entrance Examination in Bengal. The poem "On the Death of a Young Girl" is of great interest to us, as it is deeply autobiographical boding ill of her own existence. The *Sheaf* is a literary work of which we can be proud despite its minor lapses, and Harihar Das is correct in his statement when he observes that had Toru written nothing more than this, she would have left behind her something that will not soon die away.[1]

Toru's critical notes appended to the volume have been invariably praised by scholars. Sir Gosse is of the opinion that the notes "are no less curious, and to a stranger no less bewildering".[2] Her naivete and profundity are both startling herein. Although the notes reveal her wide reading and vast learning, they suffer from certain lapses of omission and commission. She has, for instance, no idea of the death of any of her favourites, and indulges in preachings where none is warranted.

**Aru Dutt's Contribution to the "SHEAF**

At the end of eight pieces in the *Sheaf*, we have the initial 'A', which stands for Aru Dutt. The eight pieces by Aru are : "The Young Captive", "The Emigration of Pleasure", "Romance

1. H. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 303.
2. E. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir", *Ancient Ballads*, p. xvi.

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of Nina", "Morning Serenade", "Chanson", "My Village", "The Mother's Birthday", and "The Captive to the Swallow". This is all that Aru ever wrote, and though her poetic output is meagre, she should have given us something more had she lived longer. She was simply twenty when she expired. She was a gifted child of Nature, no less gifted in her taste and skill than her younger sister. She was an adept at pencil (which Toru was *not*), and had a novel in mind to illustrate (to be written by Toru, though). The novel was *Le Journal*. Govin Chunder has thrown light on this aspect in his Prefatory Memoir.

Aru, like her sister, had an unusual lyrical talent and efficiency. She has given us "some altogether complete gems".[1] Her mind was saturated with Romanticism, and her subjects are all delicate and pathetic in texture. Pathos is the hallmark of her work. She loved to indulge in the transient elements of Romantic flavour with utmost dedication.

Aru's first poem, "The Young Captive" is based on Andre Chenier's "Le Jeune Captive", the heroine of which, according to Toru, was Aimee de Coigny, Duchess de Fleury. The Duchess falls a victim to the forces of French Revolution. The whole of the poem abounds in pathetic touch and romantic imagination until the climax is struck in the penultimate stanza :

> A prisoner myself broken-hearted and crushed,
> From my heart to my lips all my sympathies rushed,
> And my lyre from its slumbers awoke ;
> At these sorrows, these wishes, of a captive, I heard,
> And to rhyme and to measure I married each word
> As softly and simply she spoke. (p. 5).

For one eager to make comparison with the original, the French version of the above stanza is being given below :

> L'epi naissant murit de la faux respecte ;
> Sans crainte du pressoir, le pampre tout l'ete
> Boit les doux presents de l' aurore ;
> Et noi, comme lui belle, et jeune comme lui,
> Quoi que l'heure presente ait de trouble et d'ennui,
> Je ne veux pas mourir encore.

1. Kalipada Mukherjee, "Aru Dutt and Her Work," *The Calcutta Review*, XL III (Apr.—June 1932), 198.

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Obviously, Aru kept her renderings no less close to the original than her younger sister.

The next poem, "The Emigration of Pleasure", is also a fine piece of translation. It depicts the sorrows of France at a time when it was locked in war with European nations. A piece of five stanzas in all, it is steeped in misery and frustration.

Another poem, "Romance of Nina", is of shorter length. It became very popular when it was published. It can be sung and memorized. Its full text runs thus :

When back the well-loved shall return
To her who pines though once so dear,
The Spring from its abundant urn
Shall scatter blossoms far and near.
I watch, I wait ;—in vain, in vain,
The loved and lost comes not again.

Ye birds far sweeter shall ye sing
When ye shall catch his tender tone ;
Then haste the well-loved back to bring.
I'll teach ye songs of love alone.
I watch, I wait ;—in vain, in vain,
The loved and lost comes not again.

O echo whose repose I mar
With my regrets and mournful cries,
He comes, – I hear his voice afar,
Or is it thine that thus replies ?
Peace ! hark he calls ! in vain, in vain,
The loved and lost comes not again. (p. 23)

In this poem, the beloved is quite broken and dispirited at the loss of some one really 'loved and lost'. Aru's sensitive nature lent charm and delicacy to it.

The same is true also of "Morning Serenade". It was this poem that Sir Gosse first opened and read when the *Sheaf* fell into his hands. When his initial hitch and hesitation was gone and when he read a portion of it, he was filled with 'surprise and almost rapture'. Sir Gosse was, however, wrong in attributing this poem to Toru Dutt. The critic who first discovered and revealed this fact was E.J. Thompson. It is so moving and rapturous that the entire piece should be quoted here for the delight of the reader :

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Still barred the doors !—The far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free,
Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee ?
No longer sleep,
Oh, listen now !
I wait and weep,
But where art thou ?

All look for thee, Love Light, and Song ;
Light, in the sky deep red above,
Song, in the lark of pinion strong,
And in my heart, true Love.
No longer sleep,
Oh, listen now !
I wait and weep,
But where art thou ?

Apart we miss our nature's goal,
Why strive to cheat our destinies ?
Was not my love made for thy soul ?
Thy beauty for mine eyes ?
No longer sleep,
Oh, listen now !
I wait and weep,
But where art thou ? (p. 30).

Aru has rendered this piece in the best possible manner. Its high lyrical note and repetitive burden are deeply touching. On going through this piece, Sir Gosse rightly pronounced : "When poetry is as good as this it does not much matter whether Rouvevre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurredy type from some press in Bhowanipore".[1] Its original was Victor Hugo's "Autre Chanson".

The following three poems – "Chanson", "My Village", and "The Mother's Birthday"—are not so good as the poems already considered. Of these, "Chanson" is full of romantic longings and long-cherished dreams. "My Village" is also written in the same vein and style. The speaker is an exile, who wants to die in the land of his birth. He says :

1. E. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir", *Ancient Ballads*, p. x.

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Arise each day— my native land,
In memory's longing eye !
In thee began my course of life,
In thee I wish to die. (p. 41)

For one thing, in these poems, too, Aru's lyrical touch reaches the height of success. The third poem, "The Mother's Birthday", brings to light the celebration of Mamma's birthday out of deep love for her. The writer of this piece is not known, but it was, along with "My Village", picked up from *Nos Souvenirs.*

The eighth and last piece by Aru is "The Captive to the Swallows", a well-known song of Beranger. It is a fine piece of rendering. A soldier is made captive and he has nobody to talk to, and hence he begins speaking with the swallows from afar. He imagines that some of them might have been born upon the roof of his own house. He asks them to give him some news about his loved native land— France. This is the last stanza to be marked for its profundity of feeling and lucidity of expression :

Who live there yet ? and who have died ?
O speak, dear birds, for you must know,—
Who slumber happy side by side ?
And who, as exiles, live in woe ?
My country's birds, your tidings tell,
As high ye circle in the air,
Though never heart for me may swell
Nor ever rise the mother's prayer. (p. 44).

It is clear from her contribution to the *Sheaf* that whatever Aru touched with her pen became aglow with her intense feelings and lyrical abundance. She shows a commendable command of the English language in her poems, and French was she equally at home in. Her renderings may easily equal those of her sister, and abound in charm and sweetness of a superior [quality. It would, indeed, be amiss not to take her contribution to the *Sheaf* into account, as her poetic output is entirely contained in it.

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# 5

# *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*

Toru had already predicted to bring out another 'Sheaf' soon, this time gleaned in Indian fields. The prediction was made when she was absorbed in intensive courses in Sanskrit. This second 'Sheaf' is nothing else but *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. In writing this work, she was impelled by an inner urge to seek the roots for her poetic anchorage. *Ancient Ballads*, as it is, is "essentially native in genre and outlook".[1] For all her Western faith and education, Toru never ceased to be Indian. The past stories of Hindustan touched her deeply and evoked a responsive chord within her. Such ancient Indian sources as the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Bhagvata Purana* gave her woman's imagination free play, and she sang gaily about our old illustrious men and women. Her Christianity did not interfere with her literacy pursuits. After all, she was an Indian woman writing in a foreign medium, and like Sarojini Naidu who followed her, she was perfectly 'autochthonous'. In her work there is no room for "artificiality or stimulated hot-house efflorescence".[2] Here she agreably responded to the heart-beats of the antique racial tradition. As a child, she had heard stories of the past from her mother and nurse. Her studies in Classical Sanskrit added an edge to her interest in our ancient heritage.

*Ancient Ballads* was published posthumously in 1882, with an Introduction by the noted English critic Sir Edmund Gosse. Apparently, Toru had originally planned a series of nine ballads and legends for this volume, but when her father searched her papers after her expiry, two were missing, or possibly not written. He filled up the gap with "The Legend of Dhruva" and "The Royal

1. A.N. Dwivedi, "Toru Dutt and Her Poetry", *World Literature Written in English*, 14, No. 2 (Nov. 1975), 286.
2. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, p. 64.

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Ascetic and the Hind", the two tales that she had translated from the *Vishnu Purana* and that had appeared in *The Bengal Magazine*. These two tales were, in truth, her first experiments with poetical composition in blank verse. Of the remaining ballads, it may be safely said that "Savitri", "Lakshman", and "Jogadhya Uma" are the later pieces in comparison with "Buttoo", "Sindhu", "Prahlad" and "Sita", as these last four show in no way the accomplishment of the first three.[1] They lack the fire and skill of the other ballads. However, there is a common feature in all the ballads,--the employment of the octosyllabic metre. Besides trying at blank verse, Toru used pentametre in "Sindhu". On the whole, this wonderful work marked "the beginning of a new phase in the development of Toru's genius, namely, her desire to give expression to her intense love of her own land and its traditions".[2]

**Critics' Opinions**

*Ancient Ballads* is a very popular work of Toru Dutt, especially "Savitri" in it. Sir Gosse welcomed it thus : "We believe that the original English poems which we present to the public for the first time today, will be ultimately found to constitute chief legacy to posterity".[3] Harihar Das thinks that it is "the best work in English", and that it "shows how Toru's intellect, while thoroughly assimilating the spirit of French and English literature, found eventually its truest expression in Sanskrit literature : and this was final phase in the evolution of the mind of this sensitive, intensely Indian poetess. This work was the result of a year's study of Sanskrit with her father after the return of the family from Europe .....".[4] Another noted critic, T.O.D. Dunn, has observed thus about it : "This volume, published by Messrs. Kegan Paul, contains her latest best work. "It is not large in quantity, but its value is understandable. Unlike her predecessors, Toru Dutt did not wilfully anglicise her ideas. For the first time in literature of this kind, there is struck a genuinely Indian note and through the medium of a perfect

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1. A.N. Dwivedi, ed. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 1976), p. 63.
2. Harihar Das, *op. cit* , p. 331.
3. E. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir", *Ancient Ballads*. pp. xxii-xxiii.
4. Harihar Das, "The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry," "*Asiatic Review* (October 1931). pp. 695-696.



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English expression, there is conveyed something of the sincerity of a mind proud of the intellectual traditions of its native land...Her verse is finely knit, vigorous and of a pleasing variety. It is never obviously imitative, and moves with such freedom and independence as are inseparable from genuinely creative work."[1] Lotika Basu thinks that *Ancient Ballads* deserves to live as a document which 'for the first time reveals to the West the Soul of India through the medium of English poetry.'

The sound Toru Dutt scholar, B.K. Talookdar, has made the following remarks about it : "The most striking thing about the *Ancient Ballads* is that Toru is growing back into her own nation after having been alienated from it for a long while by two foreign literatures. One year's work at Sanskrit and the inspiration of her earliest recollections of stories told by her mother bring her back to the very heart of India. Here all artificiality is banned, all superficiality has disappeared, only Toru remains, with roots which have just begun growing into her own land. To ask how deep these roots would have grown is a matter of vain and melancholy speculation; it is enough to know that they are healthy and strong roots."[2] The great advocate of Indian creative writing in English, Prof Amaranatha Jha, has spoken highly of this poetic volume. He says, "As one reads the ballads printed in this volume one is struck with the large space covered by descriptions of nature. "Indeed, it may be reasonably said that had she lived longer, she would have attained distinction in narrative verse and in descriptive verse. She has a rare gift of story-telling, of arousing interest and curiosity, of creating suspense, and of drawing character. But perhaps in descriptive poetry she is even superior."[3] Radhakamal Mukerjee holds that for Toru's perfect poems, readers will have to come to *Ancient Ballads* where deficiency in scholarship was greatly overcome; and the muse, now freed from the trammels of translation, came out in a gorgeous form.[4] Dasgupta praises the novel method of presentation and the depth of thought

1. T.O D. Dunn, *The Bengali Writers of English Verse* (1918), p. 22.
2. B.K. Talookdar, "The Poetry of Toru Dutt, *Journal of the University of Bombay*, (1936), p. 82.
3. Amaranatha Jha, "1ntroductory Memoir, " *Ancient Ballads*, p. 30.
4. Radhakamal Mukherjee, et al., "Writers and Social Reformers : Great Indian Women of the Nineteenth Century, "*Great Womem of India* (1953), p. 402.

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in it. In this connection, he writes : "This novelty in presentation and thought is the result of optimistic colour. This is Indian, as well as modern, despite the fact that the poet revels in didacticism, What saves these poems from ethical prepossession is the poet's craftsmanship in the art of lyrical balladry marked with narrative simplicity.".[1]

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the view that by the time Toru wrote *Ancient Ballads*, she was already "a good craftsman in verse, her feeling for words was impeccable, and her eye and ear were alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. But these tales—some of them, at least were more than mere poems of action or character they trafficked with the supernatural."[2] Padmini Sengupta maintains that Toru's ballads "run much more smoothly and do not 'limp' as much as her French translations and are at the same time almost inspired."[3]

These critical opinions of various scholars convince the reader that all are one and the same in the praise of Toru's poetic power and her mastery of balladry. Unfortunately, this star of poetic horizon disappeared so soon, or she should have ranked with the great Romantics of English literature. *Ancient Ballads* immediately reveals that she belonged to the Romantic tradition of poetry. She has been called by B. N. Seal 'the first neo-ro-mantic Bengali writer'. The dominant lyric note in her poetry may be attributed partly to her musical gift and predominantly soft feelings, and partly to her intimate study of the French Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. Her literary sensibility must have been considerably influenced by this study. There is a Jane Austenean calm in her poetry. There is also a deep, nostalgic strain in it. Toru's treatment of the myths and legends of ancient India has "a romantic suggestion", and her fondness for them may be said to have introduced "a kind of medieavalism,"[4] into Indo-Anglian verse. The poetry of Toru Dutt is notable also for the feel of Indian life in an intricate tongue.

1. Alokeranjan Dasgupta, "This Fragile Exotic Blossom of Songs," *Indian Literature*, IX, No. 2 (1966), 11.
2. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (1973), pp. 65-66.
3. Padmini Sengupta, *Toru Dutt* (1968), p. 82.
4. P.C. Kotoky, *Indo-English Poetry* (1969), p. 8.

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**Savitri**

Every poem in this volume has already captured the attention of the critical world. The first poem in it, "Savitri", narrates the troubled fortune of the princess Savitri and her courageous encounter with the God of Death. The constancy of the heroine, her chastity, and her extraordinary devotion to her husband Satyavan are still considered as "the highest standard of conjugal love today".[1] It is one of the most beautiful legends in the *Mahabharata*, for it describes in an impassioned language the persistence with which Savitri pleads with Death to restore her husband's life, and her pure and deep love for Satyavan is sufficient to overcome all obstacles. The story is recounted in an absorbing way, and it is with breathless anxiety that the reader anticipates the final victory of Savitri. Toru is at home here in ballad form.

The ballad is in five parts. In the first part, we get information about Savitri's birth and parentage, her unusual grace, her falling in love with Satyavan, and her parents' and Narad Muni's approval of her marriage with the youth of her heart. In the second, we have Savitri's marriage with Satyavan, her going to the hermitage, her constant devotion to gods and goddesses by keeping fasts and vigils and by offering prayers, Satyavan's departure for the forest along with Savitri, and the acute pain in Satyavan's head. In the third, the session in Death's court is shown, and the decision of Yama to go himself for the soul of Satyavan is communicated. In the fourth, we are told about Yama's arrival on the death-scene, Satyavan's death proper, Savitri's persistent following of Yama, and the philosophical discussions of Savitri which please Yama so much that he grants three boons, including Satyavan's life, to her. In the fifth, we learn about Satyavan's regaining of consciousness, his pleasant talk with his wife, their return to the hermitage, and their happy domestic life. Let us now consider this important ballad and the events shaping it in some detail.

Savitri was the only child of the king of Madra, who lived in 'those far-off primeval days' of Indian history when women were not 'pent in closed zenanas'. Beautiful of face and form, sunny and sweet of nature, like the maid of Browning's "Pippa Passes," Savitri was a benediction wherever she passed. To her parents she

1. Harihar Das, "The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry," *Asiatic Review*, p. 700.

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was a perfect gift with 'a nature pure as snow'. Her matchless purity and beauty are aptly described in the following lines :

The sweet simplicity and grace,
Abashed the boldest ; but the good
God's purity there loved to trace,
Mirrored in dawning womanhood.[1]

As Savitri grew up into womanhood, her father anxiously pondered the question of her marriage, but could think of no 'fitting mate for one so pure'. He yielded at last to the persuasion of his dear wife that the matter be left with God.

Months passed, and one summer morning Savitri went through the cornfields on her way to the hermitage, she saw some youths intent on sport. Among them there was one 'tall and lithe' and 'royal in port' and 'so frank and noble'. She looked and looked, and gave a sigh, and slackened her pace. Toru's comment on this situation is remarkable :

What was the meaning—was it love ?
Love at first sight, as poets sing,
Is then no fiction ? (p. 40)

Savitri's choice was now made. Reaching the hermitage, she inquired about the youth and learnt that his name was Satyavan, son of Dyoumatsen, the former king of Salva, who had been deposed by his enemies, and now old and blind, lived with his queen and only son as a hermit.

Savitri returned home with an unusual joy. She quickly confided her new feelings to her mother, and not long after this, Narad Muni, for whom nothing was a 'sealed book, came to the palace. Savitri's father explained to the great sage his own perplexity regarding the wisdom of his daughter's choice. To his dismay the Muni became strangely troubled and after repeated requests he declared that Satyavan was doomed to die within a year:

Upon this day as rounds the year
The young Prince Satyavan shall die (p. 45).

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1. Toru Dutt, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, ed. Amaranatha Jha (Allahabad : Kitabistan, 1969), p. 38. All subsequent quotations from *Ancient Ballads* refer to this edition.

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Narad tried to persuade Savitri to choose another husband, which she firmly refused to do, and with grave dignity declared :

> Once, and once only, have I given
> My heart and faith—'tis past recall ;
> With conscience none have ever striven,
> And none may strive, without a fall. (p. 47).

It Fate had allotted to her 'the miseries of a widow's life', nothing would alter the decree. She did not budge even an inch and the marriage was celebrated with great rejoinings. She came to her future home, where Savitri was graciously received by Dyoumatsen and his queen. Months of quiet happiness now followed in the fulfilment of all her homely duties, but she was troubled inwardly by the remembrance of Narad's prophecy. She now began to offer her prayers earnestly to God and to feed birds and Brahmins.

At last the fateful day arrived. Savitri intensified her prayers and vigils. The day passed eventlessly. When the evening drew in, Satyavan expressed his desire to go to jungle to collect fruit and flower and return in time. Savitri, too, accompanied him. While cutting the branches of a tree, Satyavan felt an acute headache His axe fell down. With unique calm Savitri supported her dying husband, and for hours they remained there looking 'like statues, magic-bound'.

In the meantime, there was consternation in the court of Death, for Prince Satyavan had not yet arrived. The emissaries of Death could not accomplish their mission, for Satyavan was protected by one whose radiance around prevented the approach of any 'soul of evil'. Death, therefore, decided to go personally for Satyavan's soul.

As Savitri still sat beside her dying husband, she saw a stranger slowly glide beneath the boughs, with a crown on his head and a scarlet vestment on his dark skin. She got up and enquired about his errand there. Death revealed his purpose to her, accomplished it, and departed with the soul of Satyavan. Savitri softly laid down the corpse of Satyavan on the ground and quickly followed Death, heedless of Death's warning to carry out the funeral rites and sacrifices enjoined by the sacred writings. She told the God of

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Death that she must remain with her husband in woe or weal, whether he went somewhere on his own or whether he was carried by someone else.

Then followed the marvellous philosophical conversation between Savitri and Death. Savitri started speaking in terms of Vedantic philosophy :

I know that in this transient world,
All is delusion,—nothing true ;
I know its shows are musts unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joys, be magic bound
In Maya's network frail and fair,
Is not my aim ! (p. 66).

Death, or Yama, was greatly pleased with Savitri and desired her to ask for a boon but the life of Satyavan. Savitri then said :

Well, be it so. My husband's sire,
Hath lost his sight and fair domain,
Give to his eyes their former fire,
And place him on his throne again. (p. 68).

Yama granted the boon. Again, Savitri entered into a conversation with Yama, and tried to interpret death as love :

Men call thee Yama ——conqueror,
Because it is against their will
They follow thee,——and they abhor
The truth which thou wouldst aye instil.
If they thy nature knew aright,
O god, all other gods above ?
And that thou conquerest in the fight
By patience, kindness, mercy, love,
And not by devastating wrath,
They would not shrink in childlike fright
To see thy shadow on their path,
But hail thee as sick souls the light. (p. 70)

These words buoyed up Yama, who favoured Savitri with another boon. This time Savitri demanded that her own father be blessed with a hundred sons. It was gladly granted to her. Then she

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applied a very persuasive logic to win Yama's heart. She begged him to allow her to live always in the midst of good persons, and as there could be no better company than that of Yama, she should be permitted to be with him. Her actual words are really worth quoting :

Of all the pleasures given on earth
The company of the good is best,
For weariness has never birth
In such a commerce sweet and blest ;
The sun runs on its wonted course,
The earth its plenteous treasure yields,
All for their sake, and by the force
Their prayer united ever wields,
Oh let me, let me ever dwell
Amidst the good, where'er it be,
Whether in lowly hermitcell
Or in some spot beyond the sea. (pp. 71-72).

This manna-like speech of Savitri gladdened the heart of Yama and he promised to give her one more boon before he left for his own dim domain. Yama laid down no conditions this time. Savitri immediately caught the clue and demanded :

Let my Satyavan live again
And children unto us be born,
Wise, brave, and valiant. (p. 73).

Yama loosed the knot that bound Satyavan's soul, and blessed Savitri and vanished in a flame. Savitri took up her husband's soul and rushed towards the dense part of the forest where Satyavan's dead body lay motionless and stark. She reached the spot, knelt down, placed the soul upon the heart, and Satyavan woke up with a sudden start. His breathing was first slow, then it grew deeper. The pair, marching slowly, returned to the hermitage where the parents were awaiting them anxiously. Satyavan and Savitri lived long and happy. Yama's boons came true in due course of time. As for Savitri, she has become immortal among the Hindus, and her name is remembered with great respect at every Hindu marriage. This is the end of the story.

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to this day
Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,
Be thou like her, in heart and head. (p. 81).

Of the nine ballads in this work, "Savitri" occupies a prominent place on the strength of its length and quality. On the one hand, it expounds the ideals of Indian womanhood, on the other, it highlights the essentials of Vedantic philosophy. It abounds in beautiful nature-descriptions,—the pompous marriage procession, the hermitage and its surroundings. Even the wild aspects of nature are not spared herein.

Harihar Das thinks that the legend of Savitri seems to augur "great future possibilities in the dvelopment of Toru Dutt's gennius".[1] But he complains that the 'human thumb' is 'a crude expression in English' despite its being common in Sanskrit. He also complains that Toru uses "repetitions of a word to fill up the requisite number of syllables in a line",[2] and quotes the following as examples :

'It was that fatal, fatal speech.'
'A gleam of faint, faint hope is born.'
'Pale, pale the stars above them burned'.
'The day long, long will not appear.'

Maybe, these repetitions are the outcome of an explicit purpose of the poetess to imitate Keats and his practice. Another scholar, Lotika Basu, opines that "savitri" is the finest of the poems dealing with epic legends. She feels that Savitri in Toru's hands develops a distinct personality of her own, distinct from her husband,, but this idea is quite alien to ancient Indian thought. This may be taken as one of the many divergences that Toru makes in the course of her story. There are some more obvious divergences in this book, such as those where the king expresses to the queen his desire to find a perfect partner for Savitri, where Narad Muni comes to the king's palace, and where Savitri first meets Satyavan.

1. H. Das, "The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry", *Asiatic Review*, p. 703.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 704,

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**Lakshman**

The next story in *Ancient Ballads* is "Lakshman", which is cast in the form of a conversation between Sita and Lakshman. Rama had enraged the sister of Ravana by refusing to reciprocate her love pranks towards him. To avenge her wrong, Ravana, the chief of demons, persuaded Maricha to assume the shape of a golden deer and come roaming about the hermitage where Rama, Sita, and Lakshman lived in the forest. Deeply moved by the golden beauty of this deer, Sita begged Rama to get it for her, and despite Lakshman's warnings Rama went off in pursuit, leaving his wife in his brother's charge, with strict instructions not to leave her at any cost. Rama could shoot at the elusive deer after a long pursuit, and the deer made a terrible sound, sprang into the air before it came to the ground in its natural form. Maricha, however, had done all possible as per Ravana's injunctions to him. He began to roar with piercing cries : 'Oh, Sita', 'Oh, Lakshman'. Sita heard the cry and urged Lakshman to rush up to the rescue of his brother. It is at this point that the story actually starts. In her fear, Sita speculates that Rama is terribly hurt by his enemies and that he is now struggling for life. She scolds Lakshman for his lethargy and inaction at this moment :

> Swift in decision, prompt in deed,
> Brave upto rashness, can this be
> The man to whom all looked at need
> Is it my brother that I see ?
>
> (p. 82)

But Lakshman speaks highly of Rama's valour and asks her to give up her ill-founded fears. He tells her that demons, ghosts, and gods are equally afraid of his might and that the cry may be a trick of the foe. But Sita blames him on different grounds, including cowardice. She attributes his reluctance to go to a baser motive, accusing him of desiring Rama's death so that he may take possession of his wife and kingdom. She humilitates him with the final declaration :

> Learn this,—whatever comes may come,
> But I shall not survive my love,—
> Of all my thoughts here is the sum !
> Witness it gods in heaven above. (p. 86)

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Lakshman is unable any longer to bear her taunts, and bids her hear him once before he goes. She has cruelly wronged him by her accusations and thrown all norms of decorum to the winds. In going away from her, he disregards the plainest orders of his chief —Rama—, but he himself will bear all the responsibility for his crime. Before he goes, he draws a magic circle on the ground with his arrow, asking her not to go beyond it lest she should come to harm. He acquits her of all blame and invokes a blessing on her before he departs, confident of a speedy return both of himself and of his brother. His departure is attended by illomens.

The poem "Lakshman" is not properly a ballad but a dramatic dialogue. There are prosodic lapses in it, as when Sita spoils the effect of fine opening lines by

> Oh hasten, to his succour fly,
> No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice. (p. 82)

Harihar Das observes that the poem marks a departure from its predecessors in that "it is not narrative, but conversation", and finds its tone "dignified, rising sometimes to the heroic".[1] This is decidedly a correct estimate of the poem. For one thing, the poem opens casually and ends casually. For a full knowledge of the story, the reader will have to go to the original *Ramayana*.

The poem presents an insight into the strength of the bonds that bind the members of an Indian family. Harihar Das remarks that "Nowhere, we think, outside Indian thought, could we get so perfect a picture of brotherly loyalty,"[2] and he is perfectly right. Lakshman remains loyal to the instructions of Rama and is not ruffled by the accusations of Sita. We know that Sita is not the Sita of the *Ramayana*, a perfect epitome of virtue, but a woman of the common rank.

The gradual working out of Sita's passion forms the most interesting feature of the poem. The opening verses convey to us a vivid impression of Sita's anxiety on Rama's behalf, and her excited appeals to Lakshman. The latter's fine justification of his

1. Harihar Das, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 333.
2. *Idem.*

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elder brother's indomitable courage, and his absolute faith in his power, serve merely to set Sita at bay. The implied reproach for her lack of faith, containing a germ of truth, causes her to turn fierce upon one who meant only to comfort. She badly accuses him and applies the truly feminine weapon of bitter sarcasm. This ballad, no doubt, contains a skilful attempt at psychological delineation of character, simple and experimental, but still showing a phase of Toru's genius with which we might otherwise have been unacquainted.

**Jogadhya Uma**

The ensuing ballad, "Jogadhya Uma", is marvellous in its dreamy and mystic beauty. Its subject is drawn upon folklore,[1] not on any old legend. It was told to Toru by her old family nurse, Suchee, of whom all the children were very fond. This poem begins with the description of a pedlar walking along the road to Khirogram in the early morning. He was then crying thus :

> Shell-bracelets ho ! Shell-bracelets ho !
> Fair maids and matrons come and buy !
> (p. 90)

In the early hours of the morning, there were few to hear his cry. Then, a bend in the road brought him to a lonely place where lay a beautiful tank shadowed by fruit trees. On the one side of this tank, a wide flight of marble steps ran from an entrance arch down to the water's edge where facing the morning light sat a lovely maiden with arresting eyes and long, dark hair. The pedlar stopped to show her his wares. His bracelets, he told her, were charms to 'keep a lover true, and widowhood avert'. As the maiden looked at them and stretched her creamy hand, the pedlar slipped a bracelet on the slender wrist, marvelling at her extraordinary beauty. As he watched her hold the bracelet up against the light, an indefinable air of royal dignity about her filled him with awe. She tossed about her hair which filled him with wonder. She tossed aside the stray curls from her face and brow, as she asked the price of the bracelet, then bade him seek payment at her home. He enquired

1. Lotika Basu incorrectly imagines that the story is taken from the *Purans*. See her *Indian Writers of English Verse* (Calcutta : The Univ. Press, 1933), p. 77.

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where that was. She told that her father, who would pay the bracelet, was an old priest and lived in the temple, whose lofty gilded spire appeared in the distance. If he (the father) said that he had no money, the pedlar was to ask him to open the vermilion-streaked box near the shrine, where the money would be found. With his wares the pedlar went to do her bidding, and the maiden prepared to plunge into 'the waters pure.'

Following the directions given to him, the pedlar easily reached the temple, where cattle, flowers, and tinkling bells spoke in a language sweet and plain. Suddenly he cried out, 'Shell-bracelets ho' and in response a hospitable old priest came out and invited him to share in the temple feast. The pedlar gratefully accepted the proffered hospitality, and then explained the errand on which he had come. Hearing the errand, the priest retorted :

> No daughter in the world have I,
> An only son is all my stay ;
> Some minx has played a trick, no doubt,
> But cheer up, let thy heart be gay,
> Be sure that I shall find her out. (p. 96).

But the pedlar re-assured the priest that the maiden, with such a divine face, was incapable of deceit. As a further proof of his story, he repeated the directions concerning the vermilion-streaked box. The priest wonderingly fetched the box, opened it, and beheld in it the exact sum needed to pay the bracelet. In a flash, he realised that the goddess whom he had so long sought for had come suddenly to the simple pedlar.

The pedlar also realised it, and remembering the awe-inspiring beauty of the maiden, he hastily dropped the basket and set out at full speed for the tank, followed by the priest. But they met disappointment there, for nothing but a solitary heron stood sentinel in the hush which seemed to have fallen over the face of Nature. As the pedlar and the priest turned sadly away, the chime of the temple bells pealed out, and they pleaded with the goddess for some sign of her presence. As they waited anxiously, there was a sudden stir in the water, and a beautiful rounded arm wearing the white bra-

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celet appeared above for an instant. Quickly the arm sank down in the water. The priest and the pedlar bowed to 'the mystic Power,' and before they turned back homeward they picked a lotus bird to be treasured 'in memory of the day and spot.' Ever since that day, the descendants of the pedlar have annually paid shell-bracelets of the old design as a tribute to the temple. In this way, they still acknowledge the gratitude they felt towards the goddess who had, from that eventful day, crowned their industry with success.

In writing the ballad, Toru shows the best kind of creative originality that can be thought of. How aptly she has turned a folk-story into a delightful poem. There is, indeed, an antique flavour about it. One cannot fail to mark the translucent simplicity of touch in it. It is difficult to accept the verdict of Lotika Basu when she remarks : "The Indian atmosphere of the poem is sometimes spilt by the rather jarring introduction of priest's house which is anything but a scene that seems to be more English than Indian".[1] It is not proper to call it 'English' only on the basis of a word like 'manse'. It is likely that Toru had not yet fully forgotten her English associations. But the content, setting, and the treatment are all essentially 'Indian'. Toru has suggested even the possible source of this story :

> Absurd may be the tale I tell,
> Ill-suited to the marching times,
> I loved the lips from which it fell,
> So let it stand among my rhymes.
>
> (p. 100).

This source is absolutely the Indian source. Harihar Das correctly considers it as "a gem of art among the *Ballads of Hindustan*."[2]

**The Royal Ascetic and the Hind**

The next ballad, "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind", narrates the failure of the life of asceticism. It centres round the matchless

1. Lotika Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
2. Harihar Das, "The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry", *Asiatic Review*, p. 700.

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asceticism of King Bharat of Saligram. Bharat left behind all his royal luxuries at home and went out to a forest to lead an austere life there. He practised religious penances and rude privations and offered constant prayers and oblations in order to attain a perfect control on his soul. Suddenly, a change came over his mind. He once went to the river to take his bath, after which he sat down on the bank for musings and prayers. Meanwhile, a beautiful pregnant hind came there to take water. She heard a lion's roar then, and leapt to death, and her offspring tumbled from her womb into the flowing water and struggled for life there. The king was deeply touched by the scene before him. He got up at once, drew the new born creature from the wave, and brought it home. Thenceforth he developed deep love for it and cared little even for his devotions. After many years, when Death visited him, Bharat's heart was still filled with anguish at leaving his little fawn, and not with the problem of Death and Eternity :

> To it devoted was his last, last thought,
> Reckless of present and of future both.
>
> (p. 105).

The poem ends with a spirited defence of the hermit-king's conduct and a condemnation of the ideal of asceticism. In it Toru reads a little lecture to the ascetics for their renunciation of the world. Here she is "altogether modern, and out of line with the past."[1] She goes so far that she forgets altogether that she is dealing with an old legend—her main purpose. In so doing she is both naive and interesting. She has been able to assert her individuality and modern outlook upon life. The sermon that she wants to impart to the reader may well be found in the last lines :

> Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
> Not in a place elected for its peace,
> But in the heat and bustle of the world.
> 'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
> Must he still labour with a living soul
> Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.
>
> (p. 106)

1. *Idem.*

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Rich in moral tone, they are not without a fine poetic appeal. The ballad retains the dialogue form of the original—the *Vishnu Purana*, but it serves very little purpose.

**The Legend of Dhruva**

Like the previous legend. "The Legend of Dhruva" is also taken from the *Vishnu-Purana* (Book I, Chapter XI). It relates the story of a prince, the son of a less favoured queen (Suneetee), who spurned the position of worldly power for the sake of spiritual greatness. That prince was Dhruva, an ambitious, indignant child who was anxious to win his father's love. Suruchee, the favoured queen, did not like this because she wanted that the king's love be solely reserved for her own son, Uttama. One day, she saw Dhruva in the king's lap and angrily asked him to give up his proud ambition. At this Dhruva, trembling with rage and indignation, ran to his mother's room where

> with a swelling heart
> Repeated to his mother every word
> That proud Suruchee spake, from first to last,
> Even in the very presence of the king.
>
> (p. 109).

The helpless Suneetee heard all and sighed deeply and tried to console her son, explaining to him the Hindu doctrine of *Karma* :

> The deeds that thou hast done,
> The evil, haply, in some former life,
> Long, long ago, who may alas ! annul,
> Or who the good works not done, supplement
> The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit.
> The ivory throne, the umbrella of gold,
> The best steed, and the royal elephant
> Rich caparisoned, must be his by right
> Who has deserved them by his virtuous acts
> In times long past. Oh think at this my son,
> And be content.
>
> (pp. 109-110)

She also held out to him the prospect of future rewards in case he lived his present life well, and advised him :

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Be meek, devout, and friendly, full of love,
Intent to do good to the human race
And to all creatures sentient made of God ;
(p. 111)

Dhruva found little consolation in his mother's words. Far from choosing humility as his goal, he declared to her his unalterable resolve :

I shall try
The highest good, the loftiest place to win,
Which the whole world deems priceless and desires
(p. III).

So saying, he left his father's house, never to return, and went to the woods to live among the hermits, and fulfilled his resolve by finding 'the highest heavens', where he still 'shines a star', and where men see him in their nightly walks.

"The Legend of Dhruva" is based on the Hindu theory of *Karma*. The treatment of the legend of Dhruva has failed to create in the reader the right impression of the young boy, who, being rudely shocked at his royal father's cruel neglect of him, retired to the forest and later became a great devotee of God. The poem fails even to suggest the conflict in the aggrieved mind.[1] Harihar Das remarks that the impression left on our minds should be one of admiration for a boy, who, wise beyond his years, saw that the only thing that really counted was not place or power, but holiness of life. Instead, we are left in a state of moral perplexity, because the child's determination to avenge the slight from which he suffered by gaining a higher position in the world's esteem than the one held by his father or by his brother is to be carried out 'by prayer and penance'. The poem is a failure in artistic terms because the poetess has failed to be in line with either the present or the past. And also, it exhibits no originality on the part of the poetess.

*Buttoo* The ballad that follows—"Buttoo" (or "Ekalavya") is derived from one of the stories in the *Mahabharata*. For its hero, it has a low-born hunter's son. One day, Dronacharya, the matchless master of magic and archery, sat in the forest surrounded by his pupils, a youngman with 'kindling eyes' came there

1. P.C. Kotoky, *Indo-English Poetry*, p. 23.

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and urged him to teach him the tricks of archery as to the others. On being questioned, he disclosed his name, caste and parentage. He told the master that he knew no fear in the world. At this the great master let loose a magic arrow that felled Buttoo to the ground amid derisive laughter of the princes present there. Red with shame, he left them, but was determined to show that worth was something independent of caste or creed or rank. He retired to a beautiful retreat in the thickest part of the jungle and began to learn Nature's secrets. He built a house of mud and reeds and leaves there, storing it with forest corn, fruit and nuts. He then made a perfect statue of earth representing Dronacharya, and placed a bow and steel-tipped arrows, wreathed with flowers, at its feet. His exemplary courage and steadfastness ultimately bore fruits for him and he soon learnt all the secrets of magic and archery. One evening, as he practised his archery, his bow proved false and his arrow went astray twice. At the same time, he heard the barking of a wild dog, which augured an evil omen. His weapons failed him again and again. At last, he let fly a magic shaft which silenced the sound, but brought about his undoing. On that very day, Dronacharya's pupils, the Pandava and Kuru princes, were hunting in the woods, and the brave Arjuna chanced upon the wild dog. In utter desperation, he sought out Dronacharya, who had promised that no other pupil besides himself should learn the secret of magic shafts, and accused him of betrayal of faith. But the master re-assured Arjuna, and accompanied him to the hut of Buttoo, who, on being asked, revealed all about his hard practice and unique skill in archery. He told that he was a pupil of Dronacharya, and looked to him as the source of all his inspiration. On hearing this, Dronacharya enquired if he were willing to yield him, as master, a pupil's due obedience. Thereupon Buttoo eagerly avowed:

> All that I have, O Master mine,
> All I shall conquer by my skill,
> Gladly shall I to thee resign
> Let me but know thy gracious will. (p. 123)

He was taken at his word, though with evident reluctance on Dronacharya's part. The master, having given promise to Arjuna,

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demanded his due: 'Give me, O youth, thy right-hand thumb'. Buttoo's loyalty did not waver even at this, and in a moment the sharp knife severed the thumb, undoing his life-work. The master was profoundly touched by the matchless loyalty of the pupil, and before he left he blessed Buttoo as under:

Fame
Shall sound thy praise from sea to sea,
And man shall ever link thy name
With Self-help, Truth, and Modesty (p. 104).

This is the summary of the story.

"Buttoo" is quite neat and clean in structure. There are few weak lines in it, and when these lines are found in it, they are guilty of mannerism, and not of jingle, as in the following:

And lo,-----a single, single tear.
( p. 114 )

It has been suggested that the comparatively long and untruthful descriptions of the forest scenes through which Buttoo passes are rather not needed. But perhaps the purpose of such descriptions is to acquaint the reader with the fact that a man living in close proximity of Nature draws his strength and inspiration direct from her. And technically, the poem is "one of the happiest and least affected"[1] of Toru's compositions. In the view of Harihar Das, "Under the circumstances, the reader is a little jarred by the unexpectedness of the description of Buttoo's attitude at the crucial moment of this test for obedience..... ."[2]

But this attitude is not unexpected since it is only normal human behaviour to react thus to a demand which revealed nothing but a spirit of mean vengeance. The teacher in Dronacharya failed the moment he demanded Buttoo's thumb. The pupil was now disillusioned, for he now realised that the man of his worship was really incapable of rising above petty considerations. For him it was a shock too deep for tears. It is, however, doubtless that politics was held above morality in those days. Buttoo gave a

1. S.V. Mukerjea, *Disjecta Membra* (Bangalore : The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1959), p. 60.
2. Harihar Das, "The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry", *Asiatic Review*, p. 710.

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superb example of patience and faithfulness by leaving the entire matter to his God, who alone was competent to judge the right from the wrong.

**Sindhu**

"*Sindhu*" is the story of an ideal son in three Parts. Sindhu was the only child of his sage-parents, who lived in the forest shades. The parents were blind, weak and helpless, and Sindhu was their sole prop. He devoted his whole life to ministering to their needs regularly. All the peevishness and querulousness of old age was met by patience and sweetness on his part for he loved to be 'their slave'.

In Part II, King Dasarath's hunting in the forest is described. One day, Dasarath organised a hunt in the forest, which rang with the blare of the trumpets. The king had lost his way, and stood at a bend of the river, watching the sunset hues fade away upon the water, and the gleam of silver scales, as fish leapt up in the twilight. As the darkness fell, he heard the sound as of a roebuck drinking. Immediately he shot an arrow and was startled to hear 'a feeble human wail', and in alarm rushed in the direction of the sound. There, with his pitcher at his side, he found Sindhu dying. The king, filled with remorse, tried his best to resuscitate Sindhu, but in vain. He was afraid of a 'Brahmin's dying curse'. Opening his eyes, Sindhu read the king's fear on his face, and comforted him with the assurance that he knew the deed was done unwittingly. Sindhu told him that he accepted his fate as a proper punishment for a sin once committed, when he had killed one of a pair of doves that rested in a peepul tree. He revealed to him: 'Blood calls for red blood still'. For his own part, he was not loth to die, but was deeply troubled for his helpless parents. As a last favour, he urged the king to carry the pitcher down the steep lane to the hut among the trees. He 'pointed,--- ceased,--- then sudden died'. The king took up the corpse and the pitcher, and moved towards the hut.

Part III shows that the parents had become anxious at Sindhu's long absence. A premonition of evil overcame the mother just as the king drew near, bearing Sindhu's dead body. At the rustling of the leaves underfoot, the old Muni joyfully exclaimed :

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Lo, here he is—oh wherefore grieves
Thy soul, my partner dear ? (p. 139).

Hearing the words, the king stopped dead in deep distress, while questions rained on him from the old pair. His stifled sob reached their ears, and with it came the conviction that this was not Sindhu. The king narrated all the tale to the parents, and laid the dead boy in their arms. The old pair, heart-broken and dispirited, bade him guide them to their bed of moss, for life had now no meaning for them. The king guided them where they had desired, and watched beside them until the feeble flame of life flickered out. But before the old Muni died, he had predicted that Dasarath, too, should one day die 'for a son's unkindly loss'. Thereafter all the three dead bodies were brought to the river Sarayu, where the funeral rites were performed with royal pomp. In due course of time, the old muni's prediction came true. Those who want to know more about the story, the poetess points out, should go and read the *Ramayana.* Mr. Kotoky says that the omission of the last stanza of the poem would have created "a better poetic effect and a deeper sense of completeness".[1] It is possible that the last stanza was written not so much for the well-equipped Indian readers as for the half-informed Westerners, and as such it serves as a good guide for them.

"Sindhu" deals with the eternal theme of parental love. Here again the *Karma* theory has been propounded—Sindhu had killed a dove and hence his punishment. Neither he nor his parents (barring the prediction) curse Dasarath. The poem is in ballad metre and Toru has tried to keep her language as simple as possible. The poem succeeds "only in patches".[2] There are crude inversions for the sake of ryhme in it. It is unfortunate that goggerel intrudes at those crises in the poem where it is most intolerable. As Sindhu is struck down, we read :

Ah me : What means this ? — Hark, a cry,
A feeble human wail,
"Oh God : "it said—"I die, I die,
Who'll carry home the pail ?" (p. 131)

1. P.C. Kotoky, *Indo-English Poery*, pp. 24-25.
2. R. Sethusavithri, "Indian Writers of English : (I) Toru Dutt", *The Literary Criterion*, 3 (Winter 1953), 40.

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It is true that simplicity is a characteristic of good poetry, as in the classic instance of Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems", but such passages as this one turn pathos into bathos. Toru Dutt, however, displays her genuine poetic faculty in the description of the hunt in the forest. The description of the closing in of darkness upon the river scene is also good, though marred by an inconsistency, for darkness is said to settle 'like a pall/The eye would pierce in vain'.

Judging from the style, which is distinctly inferior to that of the other poems, we should place it as an early attempt with "The Legend of Dhruva" and "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind". There is hardly a defence to the fact that the standard of poetry in it sinks to a low level.

**Prahlad**

"Prahlad", taken from the *Mahabharata*, is the story of King Heerunkasyapu, who had been 'a terror both of gods and men', his audacity reached the farthest limit when he tore the *Vedas* into shreds, forbade sacrifices to the gods, slew holy men, and ordered that all men should worship him, and him alone. The small remnant of Brahmins and pundits fled to the woods and caves, and there in secret carried on the worship of the gods, who, they hoped, would in due time assuage their wrongs. The tyrant's one weakness was his love for his four children—Rahd, Onoorahd, Prahlad, and Sunghrad. He took some trouble to secure for them a suitable tutor. This tutor, Sonda Marco by name, was famed for his worldly wisdom, for he knew how 'to trim his sail' and 'veer his bark to any winds that blew'. The children were sent to him to be taught all they needed to know, but Sonda Marco was sternly forbidden to teach them anything of the soul or of the gods. All were quick to master the lessons, but Prahlad was the most thoughtful among them. One day, the tutor heard Prahlad discussing forbidden themes among the boys, and ordered him not to think of such things, but the pupil remained firm in his faith. Not long after this, the four boys were summoned to the court for a test. All went well till Prahlad's turn came. He was asked to explain 'the cream of knowledge'. The boy's reply was :

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That is true knowledge which can show
The glory of the living gods,—
Divest of pride, make men below
Humble and happy, though but clods.

That is true knowledge which can make
Us mortals saintlike, holy, pure,
The strange thirst of the spirit slake
And strengthen suffering to endure.

That is true knowledge which can change
Our very natures with its glow,
The sciences what'er their range
Feed but the flesh, and make a show. (p. 149).

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In great anger, Kasyapu commanded Prahlad :

Bow down, thou slave,
And worship me, or though shalt die ; (p. 150).

Prahlad, however, remained unshaken in his conviction and boldly proclaimed his views :

The gods who made us are the life
Of living creatures, small and great ;
We see them not, but space is rife
With their right presence and their state.

They are the parents of us all,
'Tis they create, sustain, redeem,
Heaven, earth and hell, they hold in thrall,
And shall we these h'gh gods blaspheme ? (p. 151).

Hearing this, the king, in great anger, called forth the Captain of the lifeguards, and instructed him to take the adamant boy to a dungeon-cell, where he was to await the executioner. Before long, the report came to the king that the sword had refused to do its work. The court was summoned in great hurry, and the failure of the sword was attributed to some magic power exercised by Prahlad. It was decided that the boy be thrown down a precipice or buried alive in sand. But these and several other devices failed to compass the prince's death. Once again Prahlad was called to the court. The proud father flung a challenge to the gods, hearing which Prahlad revealed a newly learnt truth :

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There is one God—One only,—mark !
To him is all our service due. (p. 155).

and further :

I fear not fire, I fear not sword,
All dangers, father, I can dare ;
Alone, I can confront a horde,
For oh! my God is everywhere ! (p. 156).

The king mockingly enquired whether God was in the crystal pillar against which he leaned. Prahlad replied in affirmative. Thereupon the king gave a hard blow to the pillar, which came tumbling down. Out of it sprang a stately sable warrior of immense stature. He had a lion's head and eyes and a human body, feet and hands. With a horrible roar, he struck the tyrant on the helm and ripped him down, and hailed Prahlad as king of all the realm, and then vanished in a thunder clap. At that time :

One king lay stiff, and stark, and dead.
Another on the peacock throne
Bowed reverently his youthful head. (p. 157).

The trumpets rang aloud to mark great rejoicings.

In "Prahlad", the story is successfully told. The technique of the poem is "far in advance of that of the earlier poems".[1] Very rarely do we meet the false rhyme (as in 'heart' and 'thwart') or a line which mars the poetic effect by its colloquialism (e.g., 'Or there will come a fearful crash'). The poem reveals, too, a growing skill in selection on the poetess's part. The phraseology employed by Prahlad in his defence sometimes smacks of a Biblical flavour. His speeches are, by all means, individualistic and interesting throughout.

The poem would have finished more fittingly at the point where it pictures Prahlad, the new-crowned king, bowing his head reverently on the throne amidst the applause of the people, and leaving out the apostrophe to tyrants in general. The apostrophe decidedly shows Toru's propensity for didacticism.

1. Harihar Das," The Classical Tradition in Toru Dutt's Poetry" *Asiatic Review*, p. 714.

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**Sita**

"Sita" is the final ballad in the volume ; it is very short in length as compared with other ballads. It describes a scene frequent in Toru's childhood when she and her brother and sister used to gather near their mother in the twilight and listen to the old, sad story of Sita's unmerited sufferings at the hands of Rama. In the forest, where Sita is supposed to be after her exile, there is a clearing, which is hardly ever visited by the sunlight, and which is completely covered up with gigantic creepers, flowers and trees. White swans are seen gliding on a quiet lake, while the peacock rises 'whirring from the brake', and the wild deer bounds across the glades. The gold of the forest corn glints in the distance, where the blue smoke rises from the altars near the dwelling of Valmiki, the 'poet anchorite.' This is the background of the poem.

In terms of art, "Sita" is among the best of all that Toru has ever written. It is simple and vivid in style, and is deeply touched with a delicate pathose especially in the last lines :

> Then shall those children by their mother's side,
> Gather, ah me as erst at eventide ?
>
> (p. 159).

The poem also brings to light the poetess's keen sense of observation of natural beauty (as one may find around the hut of the 'poet anchorite').

**A Critique of the Book**

*Ancient Ballads*, as a whole, contains narratives loaded with lyrical profusion of joy and sorrow, anger and pathos, hope and frustration. But such a profusion does not, in any way, retard the flow of the stories of the past. From the volume it looks that the pathetic scenes and events appealed to the poetess most. Possibly it had something to do with what she saw at her home and what she herself suffered patiently. Her tragic case reminds one of the great Romantic poet, Keats.

For one thing, Toru is thoroughly Indian in this book. There are some beautiful scenes and sights of the native land in it. The ballads are steeped in Hindu ideals and sentiments and give a

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vivid picture of Indian life and customs. They are fundamentally about Toru's own race and country. No conscious attempt has been made at expressing thought or tradition alien to her people and culture. The sententious remarks interspersed in the ballads suggest Toru's familiarity with the best expositions of the Hindu view of life. This is what she makes Savitri say :

I know that in this transient world
All is delusion, – nothing true ;
I know its shows are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joys, be magic bound
In Maya's network frail and fair,
Is not my aim ! (p. 66)

and again :

I know in such a world as this
No one can gain his heart's desire,
Or pass the years in perfect bliss ;
Like gold we must be tried by fire ;
And each shall suffer as he acts
And thinks, – his own sad burden bear ;
(p. 67)

Of all the poems contained in the volume "Savitri" is the nearest to the Indian temper and the most articulate expression of Vedantic philosophy. The fatalistic doctrine of the popular Hindu philosophy is expressed in the following :

It is my destiny,
O fear not thou, but pity one
Whose fate is thus to die.
("Sindhu", p. 133)

The doctrine of *Karma* finds an outlet in the following passage :

The deeds that thou hast done,
The evil, haply, in some former life,
Long, long ago, who may alas annul,
Or who the good works not done, supplement ;
The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit.

The ivory throne, the umbrella of gold,
The best steed, aud the royal elephant

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Rich caparisoned, must be his by right
Who has deserved them by his virtuous acts
In times long past. Oh think on this, my son,
And be content. (pp. 109-110).

It is from Dhruva's mother consoling the boy. E. J. Thompson is far from truth when he observes that there are only "scattered beauties" in the ballads, and that Toru "stands outside her themes and does not enter deeply into them."[1] He further observes: "Nor can I consider those themes as of anything like first-class value. Some have a rustic charm which strikes the mind pleasantly enough, but not deeply ; others had been handled ages before Toru took them up, by writers whose minds were primitive, as hers emphatically was not, and in sympathy, as hers again was not".[2] These observations are not quite just. Toru has not only 'entered deeply' into her themes, but also handled the delicate stories efficiently in a foreign tongue. Her prosody might have occasionally faltered, but her themes do not. If the ballads sometimes read like translations, as Sir Edmund Gosse complained, that is owing to the poet's concern to be true to their original in Sanskrit. Largely objective in the treatment of her themes, Toru has yet imparted to them an imaginative touch, as in case of "Jogadhya Uma". Moreover, the stories have been told with utter sympathy and in consonance with ancient Hindu ideals.

There are some beautiful sketches of Indian life and scenery in *Ancient Ballads* which are as faithful as poetic. Here are the people stirring out early in the day in an Indian village :

A ragged herd-boy, here and there,
With his long stick and naked feet :
A ploughman wending to his care,
The field from which he hopes the wheat :
An early traveller, hurrying fast
To the next town ; an urchin slow
Bound for the school ; these heard and past.
Unheeding all, — "Shell-bracelets ho !"
("Jogadhya Uma," p. 91)

1. E. J. Thompson, "Supplementaary Review", *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 343.
2. *Idem.*

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And here is the charming night in an Indian forest :

Under the faint beams of the stars
How beautiful appeared the flowers,
Light scarlet, flecked with golden bars
Of the palasas, in the bowers
That nature there herself had made
Without the aid of man. At times
Trees on their path cast densest shade,
And nightingales sang mystic rhymes
Their fears and sorrows to assuage,

("Savitri", p. 80)

There are several graphic descriptions of Nature in the volume. The following passage may be marked in this regard :

What glorious trees : The sombre saul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The batel-nut, — a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
With flowers that have the ruby's gleam,

The Indian fig's pavilion tent
In which whole armies might repose,
With here and there a little rent,
The sunset's beauty to disclose,
The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
'Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows
The mango-tope, a close dark ring,
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows,

The champak, bok, and South-sea pine,
The nagessur with pendant flowers
Like ear-rings, — and the forest vine
That clinging over all, empowers,
The sirish famed in Sanskrit song
Which reveal maidens love to wear,
The peepul giant-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair,

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All these, and thousands, thousands more,
With helmet red, or golden crown,
Or green tiara, rose before
The youth in evening's shadows brown.
He passed into the forest, — there
New sights of wonder met his view,
A waving Pampas green and fair
All glistening with the evening dew.

("Buttoo", pp. 115-116).

What we have quoted here is only a portion of a long and vivid description of Nature. In fact, the *champak* and the lotus and the *kokil* always stirred the inmost of Toru's heart and she burst into delightful songs. She was keenly sensitive to sound and sight, to natural charms, and to catching colours. In all this she was like Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. Temperamentally, she was closer to these poets than to anyone else.

As one reads the ballads, one comes across some charming sketches of Indian social life and reflections on certain social problems. Mark the following passage in this connection :

And think upon the dreadful curse
Of widowhood ; the vigils, fasts,
And penances ; no life is worse
Than hopeless life, — the while it lasts,
Day follows day in one long round,
Monotonous and bland and drear ;
Less painful were it to be bound
On some bleak rock, for aye to hear —
Without one chance of getting free —
The ocean's melancholy voice !

("Savitri", p. 46).

The modern women's 'lib' movement gets an impetus when the following lines are read with a proper understanding :

In those far-off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas.

("Savitri", p. 33).

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That women enjoyed full freedom of movement in ancient India is marvellously mentioned here. Sir Gosse pays only a well-merited tribute to Toru Dutt when he remarks: "No modern Oriental has given so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the stories of 'Prahlad' and of 'Savitri', or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as the ballad of 'Jogadhya Uma".[1]

The modern turn given to some of these ancient legends is a feature not least attractive in itself, and it contributes to their strong appeal to the readers of this day. The story of "Prahlad" suggests a political moral which might have served as a motto for a Parisian mob in the French Revolution :

> The echoes rang from hill to hill,
> "Kings rule for us and in our name".
> Tyrants of every age and clime
> Remember this, — that awful shape
> Shall startle you when comes the time,
> And send its voice from cape to cape.
> As human peoples suffer pain,
> But oh, the lion strength is theirs,
> Woe to the king when galls the chain ;
> Woe, woe, their fury when he dares :
>
> (p. 157).

The same strong feeling of Democracy bursts out, with the passionate spirit of a Burns, in the lines :

> No matter, — what is rank or caste ?
> In us honour, or disgrace,
> Not out of us ...
>
> ("Buttoo", p. 114).

Here is the true picture of a self-seeking politician :

> A man
> Among the flatterers in the court
> Was found, well-suited to the plan
> The tyrant had devised. Report
> Gave him a wisdom owned by few,

1. Edmund Gosse, "Introductory Memoir', *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, p. XXIV.

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And certainly to trim his sail,
And veer his bark, none better knew,
Before a changing adverse gale.
("Prahlad", p. 145).

This is the description of Sonda Marco.

*Ancient Ballads* presents "certain subtle character portrayals"[1] through dramatic speeches in it. Savitri, Sita, and Jogadhya Uma are the ideal representatives of Indian womanhood, and give us an opportunity to peep into the mysterious feminine nature. In fact, Toru excels in portraying women characters. Amongst the male characters in this book are Satyavan, Lakshman, Bharat, Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu, and Prahlad.

The book abounds in simplicity of verse and clarity of expression. The following lines from "Savitri" give us an idea of the style of Toru's writing :

What was the meaning— – was it love ?
Love at first sight, as poets sing,
Is then no fiction ? (p. 40).

Toru's sensitiveness and the worship of the Beautiful come close to the poetic spirit of Keats, the author of *Endymion*. When Savitri utters :

In the meek grace of virginhood
Unblanched her cheek, undimmed her eye,
Savitri, like a statue, stood,
Somewhat austere was her reply. (p. 46).

everyone knows that the deft hand of a true poetic artist is at work. We see a delicacy of touch and a refined sensibility herein. A young woman's fancy is having its free play in these lines. Toru is really convincing in her description of feminine charm and beauty as here. The force that we find in Toru's verse is rarely to be seen in the writers of her sex. She depicts the matchless beauty of the goddess Uma thus :

Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,
Strong was each limb of flexible grace,

1. A.N. Dwivedi, "Toru Dutt and Her Poetry," *WLWE* ( U. S. A. ), 14, No. 2 ( Nov. 1975 ), 287.

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And full the bust : the mien elate,
Like hers, the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill,—and oh, the face
Framed in its cloud of floating hair
No painters hand might hope to trace
The beauty and the glory there :

(p. 94)

And the highest praise that she can bestow on Savitri's charm is this :

The sweet simplicity and grace,
Abashed the boldest ; but the good
God's purity there loved to trace,
Mirrored in dawning womanhood.

(p. 38).

In "Savitri," she upholds the purity of Love and its magical effects. She knows the rapidity of Love—as swift as a lightning flash. She informs us that the 'heart-rose' once opened can never shut. "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind" is an exquisite study in tenderness of feeling and pathos. In this ballad she administers a gentle rebuke to the stern ascetic author of *The Vishnu Purana* who would imply as the concluding moral of his story that for the hermit-king, Bharat, it was a sin to love his nursling. Toru's heart goes out in utter sympathy to the hermit-king, who in direct disregard of the principles of his monastic order—

Watched and watched
His favourite through a blinding film of tears
And could not think of the Beyond at hand :
So knew he felt the parting . . . .

(p. 105).

Other stories in *Ancient Ballads* are also full of pathetic situations that wring tears from our eyes and move our hearts deeply.

Taking into account the themes employed by Toru in *Ancient Ballads*, it may be said that "Savitri" tells us about the triumph of constancy in love and purity in thought. "Lakshman" demonstrates the unmistakable sense of duty on the part of that prince. "Jogadhya Uma" narrates the sudden appearance of the goddess Uma to a simple pedlar, though not to the ritualistic priest. "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind" relates King Bharat's great asceticism

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On let me, let me ever dwell
Amidst the good, where'er it be,
Whether in lowly hermit-cell
Or in some spot beyond the sea.

(pp. 71-72)

One of the Upanishadic ideas is contained in the following lines of "Savitri" :

And then the inner man was tied
The soul no bigger than the thumb

(p. 64)

The 'inner man' mentioned herein is *jivatma.*

Apart from Vedantic ideas, we have also the theory of *Karma* beautifully propounded in *Ancient Ballads.* The following extract from "Savitri" may be quoted here to vindicate the statement :

And each shall suffer as he acts
And thinks, — his own sad burden bear :
No friends can help, — his sins are facts
That nothing can annul or square,
And he must bear their consequence.

(p. 67)

The doctrine of *Karma* has been highlighted in the following passage of "Dhruva" too :

The deeds that thou hast done,
The evil, haply, in some former life,
Long, long ago, who may alas ; annul,
Or who the good works not done, supplement ;
The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit ;
The ivory throne, the umbrella of gold,
The best steed, and the royal elephant
Rich caparisoned, must be his by right
Who has deserved them by his virtuous acts
In times long past. Oh think on this my son,
And be content. For glorious actions done
Not in this life, but in some previous birth,
Suruchee by the monarch is beloved.

(pp. 109-110)



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The doctrine of *Karma* goes with the belief in the previous lives. This is what we find in the above passage. The ballad of "Sindhu" also affirms it. In that ballad, Sindhu tells Dasarath that he is now dying "a bloody death" (p. 135) because in the previous birth he had killed, with his sling and ball, a male dove.

The highest sacrifice made for the practice of spiritual discipline is to be seen in "Dhruva", where the prince of that name leaves princely facilities at home and goes out to the woods. This is Dhruva declaring to his own mother :

> Let Uttama my brother, — thy son, —
> Receive the throne and royal titles, — all
> My father pleases to confer on him,
> I grudge them not. Not with another's gifts
> Desire I, dearest mother, to be rich,
> But with my own work would acquire a name.
>
> (p. 112)

And, finally he did achieve the whole true mission of his life.

In "Prahlad", there are references to the Brahmins (p. 143). the holy *Vedas*, (pp. 143 and 144), and the pundits (p. 144). The speeches of the youthful Prahlad are couched in terms of energy and faith. His father asks him where his God is and what looks like, and why He does not come down to help his devotee. The young boy looks round, bewildered yet full of faith :

> Hath He a shape, or hath He none ?
> I know not this, nor care to know,
> Dwelling in light, to which the sun
> Is darkness. — He sees all below,
> Himself unseen ; In him I trust,
> He can protect me if He will,
> And if this body turn to dust,
> He can new life again instil.
>
> (p. 155)

The unflinching faith of a Hindu *bhakta* has been beautifully brought out in this passage, — the *bhakta* whose story still lives on the lips of the Indian people, inspiring and instructing them in moments of a spiritual crisis.

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## IV. DIFFERENT HINDU IDEALS IN ANCIENT BALLADS

In order to be able to fully appreciate Toru's view of life, one has to take into account the different Hindu ideals represented in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan.* The exposition of these ideals might tempt the reader to believe that the poetess had a propensity for didacticism. It is true that she occasionally resorted to preachings in the volume, but since she did her job through the medium of old ballads and legends, the charge is partly attenuated. Perhaps the themes of antiquity that she handled needed them.[1]

It is but natural that the Hindu ideal of womanhood should have appealed to Toru most, and in her "Savitri" she has sung the praise of that great heroine of Hindu mythology. The story and the exalted ideals embedded in it are too familiar to Indians to need any detailed treatment here. It is enough to point out here that Savitri's absolute and whole-hearted devotion to her husband and its ultimate triumph over the merciless God of Death, who is determined to snatch him away from her, are memorable events in themselves. When following her husband, 'to cross the doleful lake' she is asked to retrace her steps homeward and perform the duties of a widow enjoined by the *Shastras.* But she is resolute and moves forward on the path of duty without caring for the temptations held forth to her. Even when :

> Pale, pale, the stars above them burned,
> More weird the scene had grown and wild ;
>
> (p. 64)

She says with indomitable courage and resoluteness :

> No weariness, O death, I feel,
> And how should I, when by the side
> Of Satyavan ? In woe and weal
> To be a help mate swears the bride.
>
> (p. 69)

In fact, Savitri is an ideal wife, and is not ready to leave her husband in woe or weal. Earlier, she had shown the same kind of

1. A.N. Dwivedi, ed. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, p. 90

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courage in the face of her parents and Narad Muni in the choice of her future lord, and had declared :

"I cannot break
A plighted faith, – I cannot bear
A wounded conscience."

(p. 44)

and again :

Unwedded to my dying day
I must, my father dear, remain ;
'Tis well, if so thou will'st, but say
Can man balk Fate, or break its chain ?

(p. 47)

Hindu ideals of Duty are delineated with considerable power in each of this series of ballads,[1] including "Savitri". The heroine of the ballad says :

Where'er my husband dear is led,
Or journeys of his own free will,
I too must go, though darkness spread
Across my path, portending ill,
'Tis thus my duty I have read :

(p. 65)

Savitri very well knows her duty, and is doing what a virtuous woman should.

If "Savitri" embodies the ideal wife, "Lakshman" gives us the ideal Hindu brother.[2] Lakshman loves Rama from the core of his heart. He is perfectly obedient to the elder brother, seeking glory in faithful service, 'in life-long loyalty and truth'. He is forced by the unwarranted and unkind insinuations of his brother's wife, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, to leave her alone in the forest and go to the help of Rama. He first tries to convince her of Rama's indomitable power, and asks :

What being of demonian birth
Could ever brave his mighty arm ?
Is there a creature on the earth
That dares to work our hero harm ?

(p. 83)

1. *Toru Dutt* (Madras: Natesan & Co., 1917), pp, 20-21.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 23

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But Sita grows all the more insistent and uses harsh words for him, doubting his motive and character. She says to him :

> Learn this, — whatever comes may come,
> But I shall not survive my Love, —
> Of all my thoughts here is the sum :
>
> (p. 86)

Lakshman is now unable to bear such biting words, and decides to go to the forest. But before he goes out, he tells Sita :

> In going hence I disregard
> The plainest orders of my chief,
> A deed for me, — a soldier, — hard
> And deeply painful
>
> (p. 87)

Even while going out, he does not forget to do his duty — the protection of Sita — assigned to him by Rama. He draws a magic circle on the ground asking Sita not to cross it. But we know that Sita violates his instructions, and is kidnapped by the king of Lanka, resulting in the fierce battle between Rama and Ravana.

In "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind", we have the clash of two ideals—asceticism and love.[1] The king Bharat, a great ascetic, becomes a great lover of a hind under unavoidable circumstances and forgets altogether about Eternity and God. At the time of his death, too, he is busy thinking of the hind and not of higher issues :

> To it devoted was his last, last thought,
> Reckless of present and of future both ! (p. 105)

In the clash of the two ideals, thus, love triumphs over stern asceticism.

But "Dhruva" reverses the order in the clash between the twin forces of love and asceticism. The young boy, having been denied the love of his father due to the interference of his step-mother, decides to pursue the virtuous path :

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1. A.N. Dwivedi, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

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I shall try
The highest good, the loftiest place to win
Which the whole world deems priceless and desires,
(p. 111)

Leaving behind the palace of his parents, he goes out to the forest, and practises penances and offers prayers. and attains immortality.

"Buttoo" is the story of the ideal disciple. Being born in a low family, he is rejected by the great Dronacharjya as a pupil in archery. Still Buttoo carries on his private practice, in a remote spot until he achieves perfection. Arjuna becomes jealous of him, and instigates the master to have Buttoo's thumb as his due as a *guru*. Buttoo, on being so demanded, offers his thumb to his inspirer instantaneously :

Glanced the sharp knife one moment high,
The severed thumb was on the sod,
There was no tear in Buttoo's eye,
He left the matter with his God. (p. 124)

Drona is deeply moved by the pupil's sacrifice and prophesies fame and immortality for him in the ages to come. In truth, Buttoo's exemplary conduct is a lesson to all the modern disciples.

From the ideal disciple, we pass in "Sindhu" to the story of the ideal son. While the young boy is filling his pitcher in the evening twilight on the banks of the Saryu river in order to quench the thirst of his adored parents, he is shot by mistake by Dasarath, the great king of Ayodhya. As the whizzing arrow brings Sindhu down to the ground, he cries out in the last agony of death. And on regaining consciousness he gives expression to the noblest sentiments that can ever fall from the lips of a dutiful son :

"And so I die—a bloody death—
But not for this I mourn,
To feel the world pass with my breath
I gladly could have borne,"
"But for my parents, who are blind,
And have no other stay,—
This, this weighs sore upon my mind,
And fills me with dismay". (p. 135)

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Thereafter this dutiful boy passes away :

In "Prahlad", there is again the boy chafing under the ill-treatment of his royal father, who is highly tyrannical and proud, and who does not like the prayers being offered to God. The father has instructed the tutor not to teach his sons anything about God and the soul. But Prahlad pays no heed to such instructions, as he has firm faith in God and His omnipresence. The ideal devotee that Prahlad is accepts the challenge of his unwise father when the latter asks him to show that his God is in the crystal pillar standing by. Kasyapu, the father, spurns the pillar with his foot, and it falls down. From within this pillar appears a strange but strong warrior, who is half-man and half-lion (*narasimha*). He gives a shout, and strikes the tyrant on the head and tears him into pieces. He hails Prahlad as the 'king of all the realms', and disappears in a thunder-clap. Thus, the ways of God to man have been fully vindicated.

"Sita" presents the picture of an ideal Indian woman.[1] She bears all the tortures of an envious world around her, and is exiled by her husband for no guilt of hers. She does not complain of it, and simply weeps at the unmerited treatment meted out to her. In fact, she is an epitome of fortitude and temperance.

Thus we see that *Ancient Ballads* is a volume in which Toru's view of life, her philosophical ideas, and various Hindu ideals find a beautiful outlet.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

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# 8

# Conclusion

## I. TORU AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Toru Dutt was the first great Indian woman writing in English who brought, through her wonderful literary activities, the East and the West close to each other. An Indian by birth and a European by her training, she was best equipped for this noble task. Living in the heart of Calcutta, she used to dream of 'alien shores'. France and England were the ideal places for her to settle in, as some of her letters written to Mary Martin make clear. She was an avid reader of French and English literatures. She expressed her desire to Mlle Clarisse Badar to translate her *La Femme dans l' Inde Antique*, and the permission to do so was readily granted.[1] Her *A Sheaf* and *Le Journal* are clear indications of her deep love for French literature and people. Similarly, *Bianca* and *Ancient Ballads* attest her fascination for the English, though the latter is also a fine, fragrant flower of her fertile imagination fed on native sources. Her literary works themselves are a solid proof of the fact that she stood all for East-West understanding. Her loved and learned father, her own vast readings, and her wide sympathies for the entire mankind : these were the possible factors for fashioning her mind inclined to this kind of understanding.

This attitude of Toru Dutt can be better appreciated today, for the simple fact that the two poles of the globe have now come closer than ever before. There are obvious points of contact between them. They are co-operating with each other in matters of trade and commerce, science and technology, politics and eco-

1. See "Appendix I" to Mr. Das's *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, pp. 350-351.

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nomics, cultural and educational exchanges have become the order of the day. Such an atmosphere is certainly conducive to promoting universal brotherhood and international citizenship.

Toru Dutt was, in the truest sense, a citizen of the world, and not of any particular country. In her case, the well-known diction of Rudyard Kipling that 'East is East and West is West/And never the twain shall meet' becomes meaningless and infructuous. Mr. Fisher seems to be nearer the truth when he remarks about her thus : "In comparison with the stir and bustle of the West, the days in India seemed monotonous and without event. So in the midst of the profuse splendours of the East her thoughts continually reach out to that other home beyond the Ocean, which travel and study had made so dear to her.....In the long history of the contact and interfusion of East and West, I doubt whether there is a figure more encouraging or significant".[1]

There is usually made a distinction between the East and the West on the ground that the former is spiritualistic and the latter materialistic. Indian thinkers, in the style of Plato, do not take life in piecemeal, but as a whole ; in their outlook, both the sides—spiritualistic and materialistic—are of equal importance for the development of personality. The distinction, therefore, is not much valid ; and if it is valid at all, one must remember that Toru's concern was not religious or spiritual, but purely literary, to which end were directed all her energies and fancies. Hers was an exemplary case of literary give-and-take between the two hemispheres of the earth.

## II. THE POETESS ON THE CRITICS' ANVIL

Toru Dutt produced a small body of English poetry in her short life on this earth which received a mixed reaction from critics. In the beginning, there were some hurdles in the way of her recognition as a dynamic force in poetry. We know that when the *Sheaf* was ready, no publisher in Calcutta was prepared to bring it out. But when it was anyhow printed and privately published and reached England and fell into the hands of Sir Edmund Gosse,

1. H.A.L. Fisher, "Foreword," *The Life and Letters*, p. ix.

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Toru became the cynosure of literary men's eyes. We shall, henceforth, see how Toru and her poetical volumes were received by different critics.

Edmund Gosse was the first critic to review the *Sheaf* sympathetically ; his review appeared in *The Examiner* (August, 1876). Opening the book at random and reading Aru's rendering of Victor Hugo's "Morning Serenade", he was filled with 'surprise and almost rapture'. Later on, he while writing on "Introductory Memoir" to *Ancient Ballads*, called Toru's feat so extraordinary. But he was quick to point out the inequality of her verses in the *Sheaf*, and observed :

> The English verse is sometimes exquisite ; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear.[1]

So dislodgeable was the opinion of Sir Gosse that almost all subsequent critics of Toru Dutt toed his line. The reviewer of *The English-man*, for instance, adopted the critical tone of Sir Gosse (see chapter II for this). In August, 1879, *The Saturday Review* wrote that there was every reason to believe that in intellectual power Toru was one of the most remarkable women that ever lived. Another noted critic, Dunn, thought that Toru was the first of her sex to interpret the soul of India to the West, and as such she "struck a genuinely Indian note that reveals the sincerity of a mind proud of the intellectual traditions of its native land".[2] In a scholarly article published in the *Asiatic Review*, Harihar Das spoke highly of the "classical tradition" in Toru's poetry, especially in *Ancient Ballads*. He also wrote, in 1921, the first-ever authentic biography of Toru Dutt (which is now out of print). The great French critic, James Darmester, said of her :

> This daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an Englishwoman by education, a Frenchwoman at heart, poet in English, prose-writer in French ; who at the age of eighteen made

1. Edmund Gosse, "Introductory Memoir," *Ancient Ballads*, pp. XV-XVI.
2. T. O. D. Dunn, *The Bengali Writers of English Verse*, p. 22.

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> India aquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three-souls and three traditions, and died at the age of twenty (*sic*), in the full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel.[1]

Dr. Edward Thompson spoke of Toru Dutt and her poetry in the following manner : "The verses grip most of all for the vehement soul that they reveal, a soul which has had few fellows throughout time. Toru Dutt remains one of the most astonishing women that over lived, a woman whose place is with Sappho and Emily Bronte, fiery and unconquerable of soul as they....."[2] Another notable man of letters, A.H.L. Fisher, had been very generous towards Toru Dutt, and his observations about her deserve to be quoted at some length here :

> Toru Dutt was a poet with a rare genius for the acquisition of languages not her own. In her all too brief life she mastered Sanskrit and wrote in French and English with a grace, a facility, and an individual distinction which have given her rank among the authentic voices of Western literature. Her ear, indeed, sometimes betrayed her. On points of diction she was not always beyond reproach. Here and there in the *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* or in her amazing renderings from the French poets, we come across a word, a phrase, a discord, which reminds us that the poet was not of our race or speech and much the same has been said of her French prose romance by those best qualified to judge of it. Yet when every deduction has been made for unessential blemishes, this child of the green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great followship of English poets.[3]

The noted Indian critic of English letters, Dr. Amarnatha Jha, presented a judicious account of Toru Dutt and her poetry in his

1. Quoted in Mr. Das's *Life and Letters*, p. 1
2. "Supplementary Review," *The Life and Letters*, p. 344.
3. "Foreword," *The Life and Letters*, p. vii.

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"Introductory Memoir" attached to the Indian edition of *Ancient Ballads*. This is how he sums her up :

> One cannot help regretting that time cut short prematurely a career of such promise and such early fulfilment. There were few poetic glories which, given maturity, she could not have achieved. She could have interpreted to the West the spirit of India and could have brought about a closer and more sympathetic understanding. She might have developed into a novelist or a writer of lyrics breathing grace and sweetness. That was not to be. Let us be contented that we had this brief visitant in our midst and she remains eternally young, for ever fresh and for ever fair, still dreaming the glittering dreams of youth.[1]

Another sound critic, Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, says that Toru "has left behind her a body of achievement to which it will be difficult to find a parallel in the history of English literature".[2] Paying his glowing tributes to Toru Dutt, Mr. Alokeranjan Das Gupta has remarked :

> She was the first of our modern artists who have transmitted the nervous tension of adolescence into the saner idiom of art. In the incredibly short spell of her life, she successfully crystalized the diverse ways of innocence and experience into the supreme moment of Art which is brief, yet abiding.[3]

This is how the sensible woman-critic, Padmini Sengupta, responds to Toru Dutt: "In her 'pride in her country's great inheritance, she was Indian to the core'. And she herself has become a heritage of India, bringing renown to her motherland through the arches of the years — a name ever to be remembered. Toru, a frail and exotic blossom which bloomed but for a short while, has left a fragrance which will never die". And, finally, we come to the opinion of yet another Indian scholar, Dr. A.N. Dwivedi, who

1. A. Jha,'' Introductory Memoir," *Ancient Ballads*, p. 36.
2. A. Dasgupta, "This Fragile Exotic Blossom of Songs", *Indian Literature*, IX, No.2 (April-June 1966), 14.
3. P. Sengupta, *Toru Dutt* (1968), p. 86.

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wrote an article of good length on Toru Dutt and her poetry, at the end of which he observed :

> Obviously, Toru Dutt was the first Indian to handle English verse with ease, freedom and command. Her achievements, both linguistic and technical, were of an excellant order, and when the *Sheaf* first appeared, it was even thought that the author was an Englishman writing under the psuydonym of "Toru Dutt". In fact, Toru Dutt possessed an inborn poetic talent which found its best outlet in the English language.[1]

Taking all these opinions into consideration, it is not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that Toru Dutt has earned for herself the approbation of almost all critics and the condemnation of none. This one-sided tilt in her favour should not lead the reader to construe that even her faults have been glossed over by the critics. Her shortcomings have certainly been aired out but only to indicate the immaturity of her years and the great promise that she showed. Many critics, as may be gathered from the foregoing observations, have overlooked her minor blemishes which would have gone when with the growth of age and with greater practice in poetic art. It is this that Sir Edmund Gosse means when he says that "mellow sweetness" was all that Toru Dutt lacked to perfect her as an English poet, and "of no other Oriental who has ever lived can the same be said."[2]

## III. HER PLACE IN INDO-ANGLIAN POETRY

Toru's assessment as a poetess is based on her two collections of poetry — *A Sheaf* and *Ancient Ballads*. It is true that her poetic work is meagre, but it is real gem, and it has enabled Toru Dutt to carve out for herself a permanent place in English poetry. Prof. Dunn has rightly described her as "the founder of the modern school of English poetry."[3]

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1. A.N. Dwivedi, "Toru Dutt and her Poetry", *WLWE*, 14, No. 2. (November 1975), 289.
2. E. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir", *Ancient Ballads*, p. XXVII.
3. Dunn, *The Bengali Writers of English Verse*, p. 20.

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As regards her place in Indo-Anglian poetry, it may be said that it is with her that the real beginning in this branch of poetry is made. Her predecessors like Derozio, Kasiprasad and Madhusudan were mere experimentalists in the field. Had she lived longer, she would have produced some more poetry of lasting worth, and thereby consolidated her gains. But the saddest thing about her is what she 'might have been'.

Still, Toru remains, even today, one of the four 'classics' in Indo-Anglian literature ; the other three are Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Sarojini Naidu. These four may be regarded as the 'four wheels' of Indo-Anglian literature. And of these four Toru's name stands at the top in point of chronology. Toru showed the direction to her successors ; Tagore and Sri Aurobindo endowed depth and scope to Indo-Anglian literature ; and Mrs. Naidu enriched it with her delightful songs. So, all these four have their own importance in Indo-Anglian literature, but Toru enjoys the privilege of precedence over them.

Sometimes, a comparative study is made between Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. and to a certain extent it is valid too. The points of similarity between the two are that both were Indian women writing in English, and that both were sponsored by Sir Edmund Gosse. Both Toru and Sarojini are simple in expression, but the former is "more natural" and "more mature"[1] than the latter. Toru did not strive, barring in "Our Casuarina Tree" and the sonnet dedicated to her father, to tell the world about her personal pains and pleasures which Sarojini so vociferously did. Observations of nature of the two writer are also different. To Toru, the trees just happen to be Indian — the trees she loves, but to Sarojini the trees, in order to be Indian, must be described with an Oriental background. Further, the reader comes across a few meaningful utterances in Toru's poetry about the social conditions, dogmas, political states and flatterers, but Sarojini hardly ever tried to understand or reveal human nature.[2] Another important point of contrast between the two poetesses is that Toru Dutt worked

1. Padmini Sengupta, *Sarojini Naidu* (New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1974), p. 95.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

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ceaselessly till her end, but Sarojini did not produce a systematic work after 1917 and only occasionally returned to compose her girlish poems in the twenties, and thereafter no more. There is deeper thought and feeling in Toru Dutt than in Sarojini Naidu. And to this are added Toru's endless possibilities of reaching an ever-escalating standard of poetic work. But for one thing — the prosodic excellence, — the scale swings, guided by any standards, in favour of Toru Dutt.

Some people find the influence of the Romantic poets, of Browning and Tennyson, on her poetic art. It is only partly true, as she wrote under the dictates of no single poet or school. It is likely that in favour of their arguments they may say that there are many beautiful and long descriptions of natural scenes and sounds in her poetry and that she, while making the selection for her rendering in the *Sheaf*, showed an inclination towards the French Romanticists. But these are only arguments to substantiate a preconceived notion, and they, as told earlier, do not contain the whole truth. While discussing the *Sheaf*, it has been pointed out that Toru's selection of poets is wide-ranging, and not limited, though it is a different matter that the best of French poetry has been written by the Romantic poets. One cannot, therefore, place Toru Dutt in "any water-tight category or school of poets".[1] Once in a while, when Nature wearies of her own uniformity and rigidity, she throws up a rare and exotic phenomenon like Toru Dutt.

Toru, in fact, stands out as a pride of the nineteenth century India, illuminating her literary galaxy. But she is much more than that. She is a perfect fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of noble English people who came out to India with a genuine desire to help this unhappy land of promise to reach her destined greatness, and also a sure warning against the futile attempt of grafting an alien culture and civilization on a land grossly misunderstood. We cannot think of a greater fulfilment than in her of the high moral qualities, of the unshakable faith in Jesus, of the intellectual attainments of Europe's best minus her sciences. She has been

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1. Najoo Bilimoria, "Toru Dutt : Beloved of the Gods," *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (March 4, 1956), p. 64.

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characterized as a "great daughter of India, holy as a white lotus, sweet as a rose, who ... enjoyed the beauty of the sky and air, redolent of myrrh instead of the tulasi."[1] The only objection here is that Toru was as well a 'myrrh' as a 'tulasi'. The latter is taken as a token of the soul of India, and it is next to impossible that a person of Toru's sensibility should remain oblivious of the soul that produced her. *Ancient Ballads* is a living example of it. Taking this fact into account, it is natural for us to subscribe to the view of an enlightened Bengali critic who proudly remembers Toru Dutt as "this prestige-child of our culture".[2]

As a poetess, Toru has never been 'forsaken'. There is hardly another English writer in India who is so regularly remembered in the journals and newspapers of the country. In India's *Who's Who*, she figures among the great. Neither are her biographers in English, Bengali and French scarce. She has certainly passed the test of time, and is still very much alive, proving herself a 'classic' writer. It is, therefore, difficult to agree with those who treat her as 'a dead-horse'. On the contrary, she has almost always found a place in an anthology of Indo-Anglian poetry, and right from her own days, some of her poems, notably "My Vocation", "Our Casuarina Tree", "The Lotus", "The Sonnet — Baugmaree", "Savitri" "Lakshman", etc., have been prescribed in the syllabi of schools, colleges and universities. Is it not a solid proof of her living greatness ? She has decidely created a permanent place for herself in English poetry. The learned critic, Sir Edmund Gosse, is quite correct when he observes thus : "when the history of the literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page in it dedicated to this fragile exotic blossom of song".[3] And the observation has come true, as we do find a page dedicated to Toru Dutt in George Sampson's *The Concise Cambridge History of English*

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1. Radhakamal Mukerjee, "Toru Dutt", *Great Women of India*, ed. Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, (Mayavati, Almora, Himalyas: Advaita Ashram, 1953), p. 403.
2. Quoted from a letter, dated March 25, 1975 that Dr. Prithwindranath Mukerjee, the translator of Le *Journal*, wrote from Paris to me.
3. Gosse, "Introductory Memoir," *Ancient Ballads*, p. xxvii.

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*Literature* (p. 914). She has, thus, come to occupy her legitimate place in the annals of English letters and no detractor can dislodge her from there :

A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night, —
It was the plant and flower of Light,
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be

—Ben Jonson.

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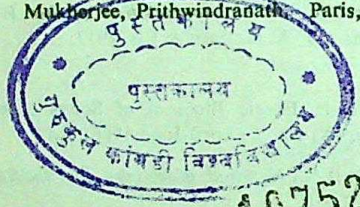


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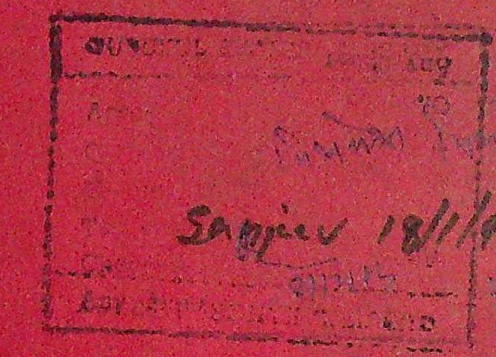

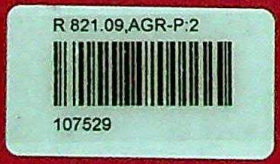


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